The ETERNAL WALL by R. Z. GALLUN

See BACK COVER

AMAZING STORIES

NOVEMBER 25c

AFTER AN AGE

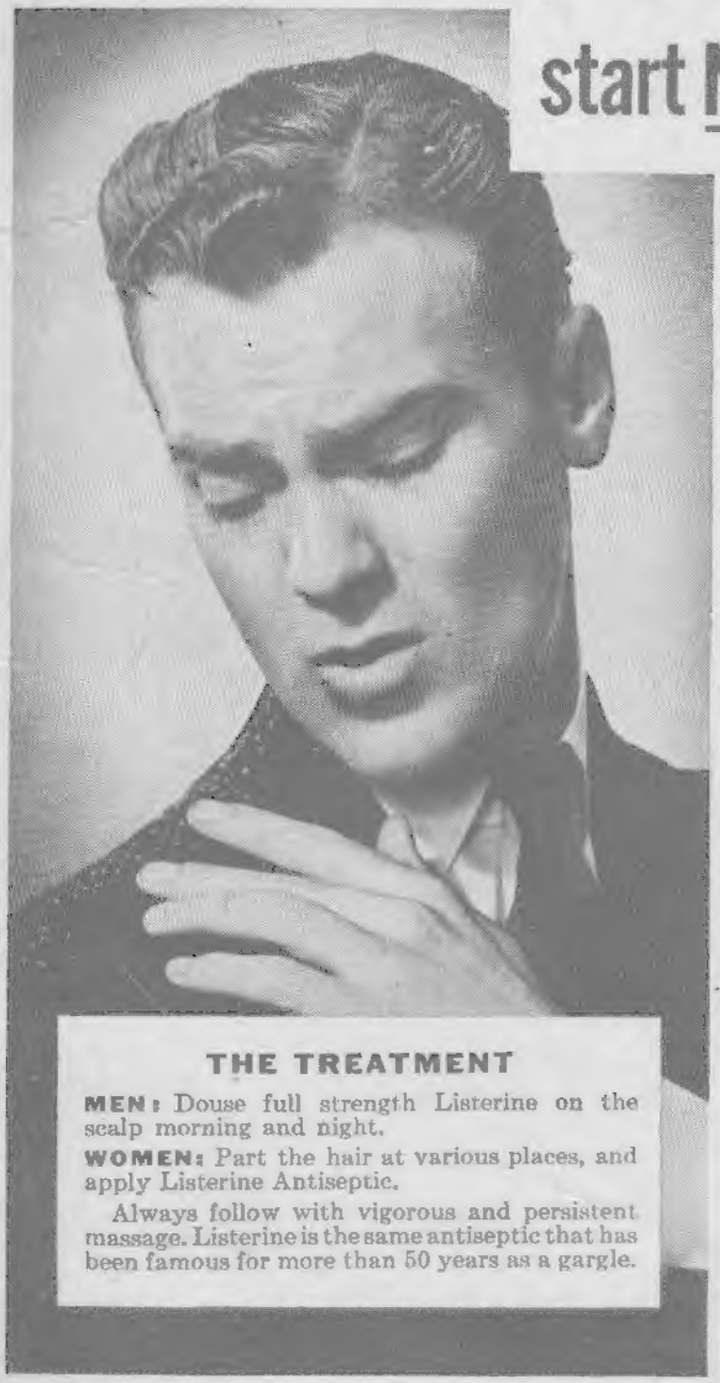
EPIC FULL LENGTH NOVEL! By FANDO BINDER

TELL-TALE FLAKES?

ITCHY SCALP?

UGLY SCALES?

LOOK OUT FOR INFECTIOUS DANDRUFF!



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Dept. 2KM, National Radio Institute
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NOVEMBER

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating a scene from "After An Age"
Back cover painting by James B. Settles depicting the "Airship Of Io"
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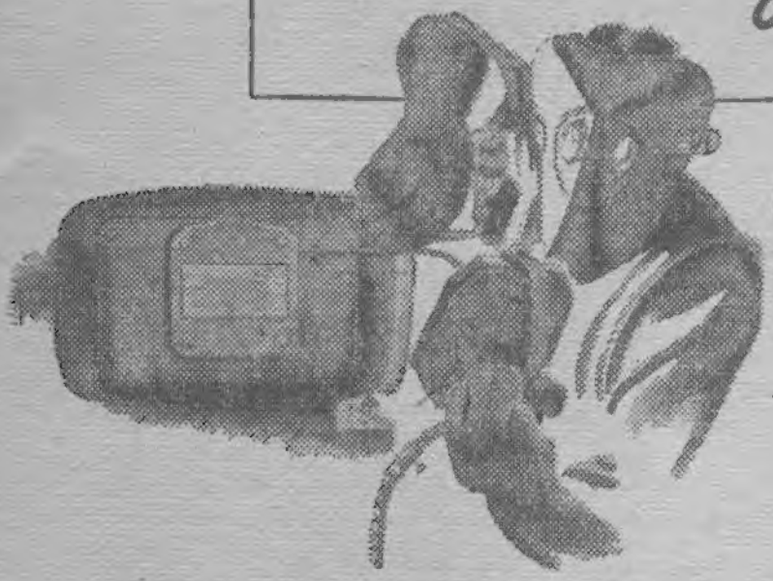
Volume 16 Number 11

The Memory of an Atom



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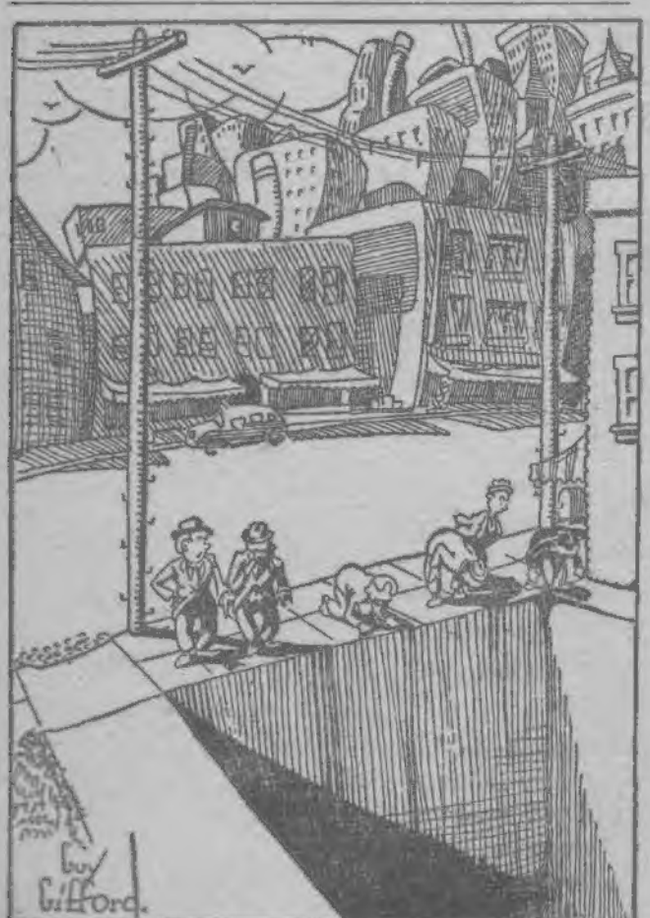
The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

THIS is the issue you readers are going to put down in your memory as "a milestone" in our history—because in this one you're getting something you've asked for. It's a complete, book-length novel written by one of your favorite of favorites, Eando Binder. Ever since "Darkness and Dawn" was published years ago, you've asked for another epic of the future struggles of mankind. Well, here it is. One hundred twelve pages of smashing novel; "After an Age" by science fiction's oldest (in experience) ace of novel writers.

THE cover illustrating the novel is by your newest favorite, Robert Gibson Jones. We're sure you're going to like it, as well as the excellent job Russell Milburn did on the interior illustrations. This one will give you a chance to compare this new Jones girl with the Mac girl who appears in our companion magazine this month, *Fantastic Adventures*, also illustrating a complete novel (When Freemen Shall Stand, by Nelson S. Bond).



"We're the wise guys who kept telling Uncle Pinchpenny that he couldn't take his property with him when he died!"

ROBERT BLOCH, who does those fascinating Lefty Feep stories for *Fantastic Adventures*, comes to AMAZING with a story of murder on the moon which will make the shivers crawl up and down your spine. Bloch can certainly handle this kind!

RAYMOND Z. GALLUN, who is still tramping the world, gives us another short called "The Eternal Wall" which takes us millions of years into the future in a "sleeper wakes" type of story with quite a different twist to it. You'll like the "future people" of this story—although we warn you, they aren't exactly what you'd expect the successors of man to be.

EMIL PETAJA, whose first story in our magazine was very well received indeed, comes back this month on the strength of that reception. He does one called "Dinosaur Goes Hollywood." The illustration, by Brady, is an exceptionally good one, and unlike most of our illustrations, is done exactly the same size as reproduced. Other illustrations (except Magarian's which are done only three-quarters actual size) are usually half larger or twice size. Maybe those points are something you didn't know about illustrations, eh? Oh yes, Virgil Finlay also works his drawings same size.

WE KNOW you'll welcome another return of A. R. McKenzie's Juggernaut Jones. The irrepressible salesman goes in for "hauling" in a big way in this new one, and as he usually does, moves a lot more things around than freight!

H. B. Carleton presents something of an innovation in this issue, a story called "Hard Guy" with an O. Henry twist at the end. We'd

(Continued on page 120)

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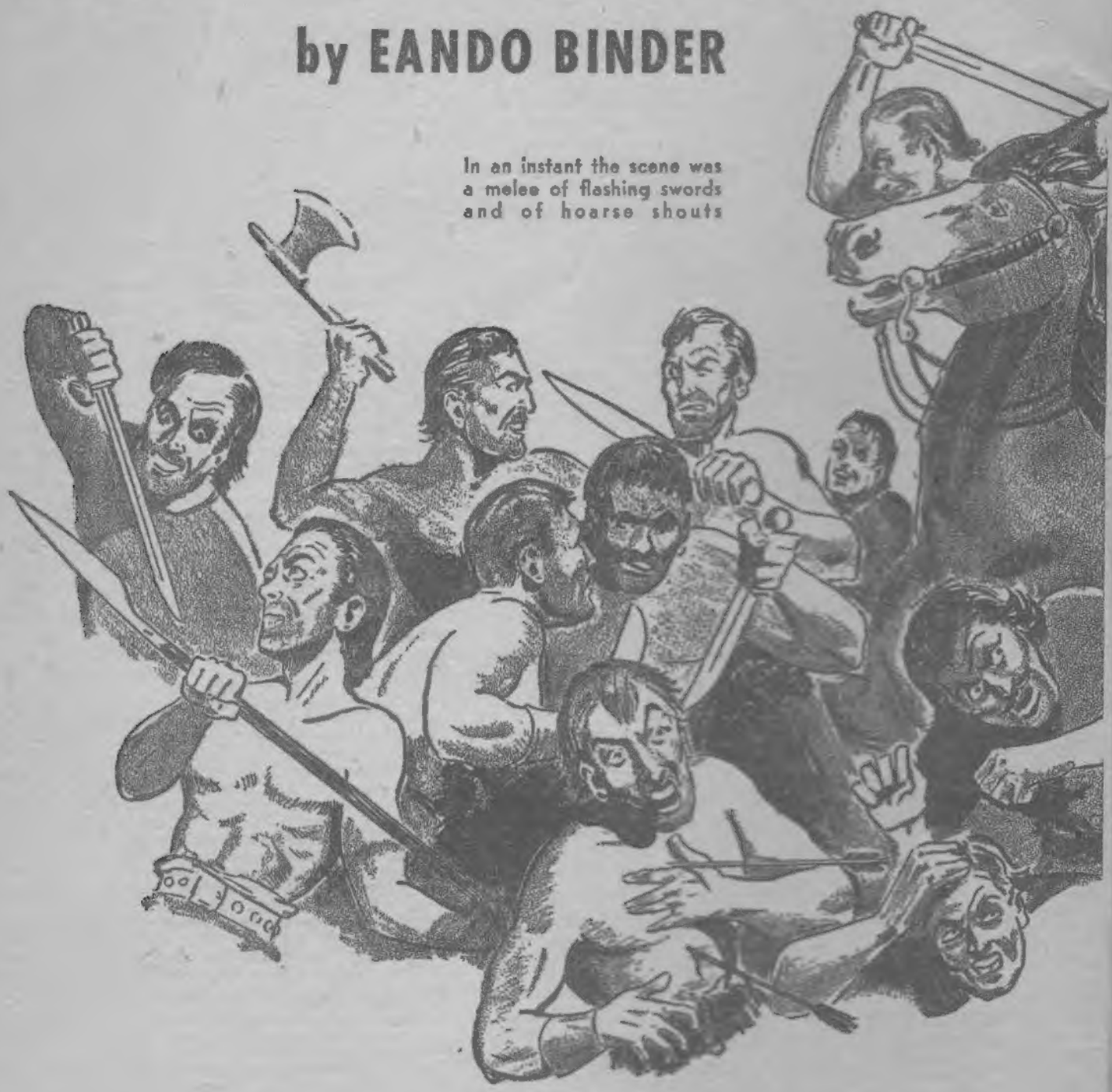
AFTER AN AGE

by EANDO BINDER



In an instant the scene was a melee of flashing swords and of hoarse shouts

CHAPTER I

Magna Charta 5000 A.D.

KNIGHT read the preamble, his voice vibrant:

"To the People of Earth of 5000 A.D.! The Government of Mankind shall hereafter be known as the World-State Government. Its Congress of Delegates from every Tribal-state shall have sole power to make laws. Appended are all details of procedure and office. One cardinal rule must always be followed—that no man on Earth shall have absolute power over any other man, or over any Tribal-state, or over the World-State.

"I, Stuart Knight, First Lord of Earth, relinquish all claim to rule. It

Stuart Knight awoke in the future to find the world needed rebuilding; but men from three ages complicated the job.

must never be given to one man again, or to any group not elected by the people. May Providence preserve the World-State for as long as humanity inhabits this World!"

THAT was all.

Knight had reduced his preamble to its barest essentials. He had never believed in oratory. The simple words, he knew, would strike home in every heart.

Below the balcony, as his voice died, the delegates burst out in wild cheers, taken up by the whole crowd. The noise died. There was a pause. Then, spontaneously, another cheer arose. And Knight knew by its tone, if not its confused words, that it was for him. For what he had been to them for twenty-

five years—a beneficent dictator.

His thoughts flew back.

Twenty-five years had passed since Stuart Knight, scientist of the 20th century, had awakened in his time-crypt, from suspended animation, after 3000 years.

He had been revived, like a living fossil, by the future people of 4975 A.D. He had stepped out in eager awe, expecting to see a mighty, thronging civilization, as far ahead of 1940 as 1940 had been ahead of the Grecian Era. Instead had come a crushing revelation. After a long series of frightful wars, and a Second Dark Age, mankind had plunged back to the Stone Age!

With the collapse of the Machine had come social eruption, famine, anarchy, and barbarism. All the knowledge of a mechanical civilization had been lost. Tribal-states had arisen, all over Earth, each a law unto itself. It was a reincarnated Stone Age, without metals, without machines, and as steeped in the primitive and unmechanical as 20,000 B.C. had been.

Into this strange world Stuart Knight had been cast.

And thereby history had pivoted, twenty-five years before. Staggered at first by the return to a Stone Age, a second revelation followed. Down in Antarctica, a bit of power-and-metals civilization had survived, based on ore and coal deposits there.

These favored Antarcticans—or *Narticans* in the clipped, modified English of the day—held sway over Stone Age earth, as if it were their feudal backyard. They took servants—almost slaves—and food tribute from those they called the *Tribers*. And for a thousand years they had slipped deeper into the mire of decadence and spiritual death.

Such was the world Stuart Knight had been dropped into, like a bit of driftwood in the currents of Time.

Nine-tenths of humanity in a Second Stone Age. The remainder in an isolated Babylon. The whole in a stalemate that throttled progress.

Stuart Knight had changed that. For a year he had preached, and the world had rallied behind him. First Lord of Earth he had been proclaimed, with destiny in his hands. Destiny to mold and shape the future of the entire human race. For twenty-five years he had tried to bring advancement, upliftment.

It was the crossroads of history. Fate willing, a new civilization would spring forth, Sphinxlike, from the ashes of the old. And now, today . . .

THERE was complete silence again, as the sea of faces watched him.

Overhead was a cloudless blue sky. Underneath lay a hushed world. Perhaps as hushed as when a British king, four thousand years before, had signed a parchment inscribed with words of freedom.

Stirnye, Lord of Earth, was signing a second Magna Charta.

The Magna Charta of humanity!

For the historic moment, he was on the outside balcony of his capital, at the center of Manhattan Island. Columbus Circle it had been, an age before. Beside him stood one Antarctican and one Triber, as witnesses. Back of him were his two sons, and their mother, of the blonde race of Nartica.

One other was there, old Aran Deen, his silver-white hair blowing in the breeze, erudite scholar and historian of Nartica.

Knight's hand trembled, as he gripped the writing pen. Benign ghosts from the past were leaning over his shoulder—Moses, Gautama, Christ, King John, Washington.

He signed: "Stuart Knight, 1940 A.D.—"

He started, at the mistake. In the back of his 20th century mind lurked that number, and it seemed much more real than the one he should have written. In that year, 1940, he had been interred in a record-crypt, to survive after an age.

At odd times, he forgot that he existed 3000 years and more beyond the time of his birth.

He had been daydreaming, thinking of the long dead and forgotten civilization he had known. The 20th century was as remotely historical now as the ancient days of Egypt and Babylon and Rome.

Memories, only memories remained —in his mind alone. And a few old records and relics, leaking through time.

There were no books in this Second Stone Age. No electric lights, radio, telephone, telegraph, movies, trains, trucks, drill-presses, or factories. There were no coal, oil, or mines bringing up metal ores. It was a primitive world, the 50th century. Stone, wood, hide and bone were again the staples of living, as in the original Stone Age.

Knight cleared his mind of the fleeting reflections. He scratched out the number "1940" and substituted "5000 A.D."

Then he arose from the desk, speaking again.

"People of Earth. The World-State Government will preserve liberty and justice, for all time. I withdraw, because no man has the right to rule. I am from the past. This is your world. Whatever I have been able to do, toward a higher civilization, is not because I am noble or kind. It is your rightful heritage of the best, from a past that destroyed itself."

His tone became more practical.

"Six months from today, the World Convention of delegates will meet again, to finally vote for or against the new government. It will not be forced on you, for that would make meaningless the very words of the Magna Charta. It must be ratified by a majority of the Tribal-states.

"Thus for six months, I am still Lord of Earth. I suggest only one thing, before my voice has no more authority—that my eldest son, Stuart, be elected the first president of the new government. I believe him suited to guide the World Congress in its first years."

Fleetingly again, Knight's 20th century mind contrasted this with the vanished past. A man "stumping" for office, without one microphone before him. No journalists, cameramen, or publicity agents. No radio to fling his voice; no telegraph network to tap out his words to all corners of Earth. A tribal chief, exhorting his little flock, huddled around a campfire. Not quite that, but close to it.

Knight went on.

"Now, I have the privilege to announce a new invention—the steamship!"

He pointed out over their heads. On the broad Hudson, a mile away, sailed a ship. But it moved without sails, rapidly. And faintly could be heard the hissing *chug-chug* of its engine. Magic to the crowd, they stared in awe, those who could see down unimpeded avenues. The rest hardly believed, when told.

For the first time, Knight felt an uplift of spirit. Stone Age world, yes. But he had not been idle, in his twenty-five years of reincarnation. The rebirth of science! Such had been his striving since his advent. The steamship was the latest of a long list of resurrected things from olden days.

"It will replace all sail-driven craft, in time," Knight resumed. "It will cross the Atlantic Ocean in a week, without need of trade winds. The engine

propelling it was developed by my second son, Perry."

KNIGHT looked at them proudly, his two sons, reaching for his wife's hand.

Stuart, child of two ages, combined the best of his parents: Knight's rugged physique, thoughtful brow and determined chin; his Nartican mother's finely-chiseled features, fair skin, and calm poise. Form-fitting garments and a silken shoulder cape set off his broad, well-proportioned figure. He was young, but already marked by circumstance for leadership.

Knight's eyes shifted to his second son.

Perry, a year younger, was darker. A mop of black hair overhung rough-cut features that had been Knight's own, in youth. He was slightly shorter, slimmer—and yes, boyish. But somehow, he was more of Knight himself. Knight had been boyish, too, when he emerged from his crypt, till the flint of events had brought out the steel in him.

Caught by the spirit of the moment, Knight spoke gravely.

"You are just twenty-four, Stuart. But I'm getting old. You must show this Second Stone Age the way toward civilization."

Knight faced his second son.

"You'll be Stuart's right hand. You will obey him and build as he directs."

He put his hands on their shoulders.

"Leader and builder," he said solemnly, "I place the world in your young hands."

The two sons of Knight looked at each other, and then out over the city and harbor, out over the world. They gripped hands silently. Below, gusts of cheers came from the crowd.

Knight thought of one thing more. It would lighten the moment.

"Stuart, why not announce your engagement to Leela now? Their soon-to-be president, son of a man from the past and a woman of Nartica, taking a Triber girl as his wife. It will please the people—"

Stuart turned to look at the girl, Leela, standing with his mother. Her eyes dropped before his, girlishly. They had grown up together. He flushed, with the great crowd looking on. Finally he took her hand and started to speak—

But there was interruption.

CHAPTER II

Two Out of Time

A DRONE had sounded from the sky.

All eyes turned, for aircraft were not a commonplace in the 50th century. Off in the distance a silvery speck grew and became a metal bird, soaring down from the heights. It drummed low on hissing rocket jets and circled over the Capitol, as warning of landing.

"One of our ships from Europe," Perry said wonderingly. "What is it doing here?"

Knight watched curiously.

Its flight had been swift, no more than six hours from the shores of Europe to those of America, propelled by the rocket-jets of alcohol and liquid-air. In this one thing, the decadent science of isolated, buried Antarctica had contributed something—aircraft. Super-aircraft, in fact, by 20th century standards.

On the way, it had soared over countless sail-driven vessels on the broad Atlantic. Singular contrast! The mechanical eagle of advanced science, and the windjammers of a pre-steam era. They existed side by side in this queer interlude between the Stone Age and power-and-metals civilization.

Some day, Knight told himself often, there would be great fleets of the rocket

ships, and fleets of the engine-driven sea vessels, to carry commerce. Some day—then there were enough factories.

The ship dropped downward in the hands of its Nartican navigators, along a concrete runway beside the Capitol. Its wheels touched and it roared to a stop as the front jets burst out. It must be something important, for the ship to come directly here.

Knight signified dismissal to the crowd, then led the way from the balcony, down through the building and out. A side lane gave directly on to the airfield, avoiding the dispersing people.

As Knight and his party strode toward the ship, its cabin hatch opened. A Nartican pilot stepped out, followed by two figures—a man and a girl. They stood for a moment, peering about. The man was short and stocky, about fifty years in age. The girl was young. They were father and daughter, in similarity of features.

Knight stopped before them.

He was aware suddenly that there was something strange about the two. They wore tunics of glinting texture that could only be fine-spun glass. There was no spun-glass known in the 50th century. And they stared about with an air of complete bewilderment. Not only had they never seen this place before, but they had never heard of it. It was obvious in their attitude.

Knight felt growing wonder.

Where could they be from? From what unsuspected spot on Earth where the people used spun-glass clothing, and knew nothing of resurrected New York?

"Who are they?" Knight asked the Nartican pilot.

"I brought them from Vinna, in central Yorp," he answered. "A runner came from Hal Doth, Chief of Vinna-state, yesterday, to Lord Perry's laboratory. His message was that a buried stone vault had been uncovered, on the bank of the D'nube River. They opened it, then decided to inform you, since it was ancient. But not long after, these two stepped out. Chief Hal Doth could not understand their speech, nor I. I brought them directly here."

Knight had stiffened.

Stone-vault—ancient—two people stepping out!

His own burial and resurrection he had thought unique. There were no records, no fables even, of any other human being passing from one age to another. The Egyptians had left their mummies, for a future time to see. And there was a record that the remarkably preserved body of Lenin had been on view as late as 2400 A.D. But never had there been a whisper of a *living* body revived after its natural period of time.

Still, why not? If a scientist of the 20th century had developed the electro-leptic* process of suspending life, why not a later one?

KNIGHT found himself trembling. Two other beings orphaned from the world he and they had known! He looked into their eyes, and already felt the kinship of their mutual misplacement in history.

They were still staring around, like two lost beings.

Knight spoke to them.

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* Electro-leptic suspension of life is an electrically induced catalepsy. The preservation of the body of Lenin is not such a process. Lenin died of a paralysis induced by arterio-sclerosis, and the process of embalming used on his body is perhaps the most perfect modern science has yet been able to produce. Thus, Knight is in error when he says Lenin was the object of a 20th century scientist's experiment on electro-lepsis. Theorists of today are certain that it can be done, and work is progressing along such lines. However, success has not yet been attained.—Ed.

"You are from the past?" Then, on second thought: "Do you understand my words at all?" He had pronounced meticulously.

Old Aran Deen, the scholar, had shuffled forward eagerly. This was something in his line.

"Spun-glass costumes were in vogue in the 30th century," he stated. "If they are from that time, our present-day speech is mere gibberish."

"Try their language," Knight urged, impatient now.

"You speak," Aran Deen suggested to the two, pointing to their mouths and pantomiming speech. In an aside to the others he said: "There were many languages in their 30th century. But they should know English, an early form of it. If I hear their precise accent, I think I can converse with them."

The man spoke.

"Wir verstehen nicht. Sprechen Sie Deutsch?"

ARAN DEEN and Knight looked blankly at one another.

The man waved for attention and spoke again, in a changed language.

"Do you happen to understand English?" He went on wearily, half to his companion. "Good Lord, what crazy kind of world is this? No one understands us. That primitive chief, or whatever he was, in Europe. Now these people—"

Aran Deen had listened with his head cocked forward, but it was Perry who understood first.

"It's *your* language, dad!" he cried excitedly. "Your 20th century English as you taught it to me so I could read your science books!"

Knight started as though stung. He had listened blankly, unaware it was his own tongue, strange to his own ears. But Perry was right. Except for a queer twang of the vowels, and a glib sliding over the consonants, it was 20th century English! And he realized now that their first words had been 20th century German.

"Of course!" Knight exclaimed, and Aran Deen was also nodding. "Of course your language is like mine. I should have thought of it, when Aran Deen mentioned the 30th century."

Knight found himself speaking haltingly. His own birth-tongue, little used in 25 years, came out as though he quoted old stilted Latin or Greek. He went on, gaining fluency.

"Printing and radio kept English basically unchanged, all through the following thousand years, till the Second Dark Age. But I'm confusing you. My name is Stuart Knight."

Relief had swept over their faces. The man inclined his head, smiling.

"Thank Heaven some one finally understands us. We are from the year 2907. My name is Lar Tane. This is my daughter Elda."

He went on, as though eager to explain.

"Two days ago our vault was opened. At the first ray of light let in, an automatic pump drew air into our sealed glass chambers. Also its levers injected adrenalin below our hearts. Radium-motor, time lasting. We revived, from suspended animation. After two days hopelessly trying to talk with our rescuers, the plane came to take us here."

"I welcome you to this time, Lar Tane and Elda," Knight said quickly. The amenity seemed appropriate.

The two smiled, but a little in amazement.

"We understand you quite well," Lar Tane said. "But your accent is strange. Very strange. Because, instead of sounding as we expected English might sound, somewhat futurized,

it sounds—archaic! Has English gone back to a stilted form in this future time?"

KNIGHT smiled strangely.

This was a moment more unique than his own awakening. At his revival, coming from the 20th century, he had been greeted by the 50th century. But these two of the 30th century were being greeted by both the 20th and 50th! By people 2000 years in their "future," and by one 1000 years in their "past!"

It was a queer tableau. Knight answered.

"No. The reason I speak in archaic English is because I'm from the 20th century."

The two stared. For a moment an angry flush burned into the man's face, as if he had been made sport of.

"It's the truth, believe me," Knight said hastily. "Not these others, just myself. I was buried in a vault like yours, in electro-lepsis, in the year 1940."

Lar Tane waved helplessly.

"Then I must believe you. But it's amazing. You're from a thousand years before me. 1940—*Himmel!* The century of the first scientific war. You saw the first airplane, first radio, first World War!"

There was a little of awe in his voice, as if he looked at a being who had been present at Creation.

An amused smile then creased his features.

"We awake from suspended animation, in our future, and the first person we talk to, with understanding, is from a remote past! The gods themselves could not have planned a neater trick."

He became serious.

"But now tell me. What year is this?"

He and his daughter tensed forward.

"5000 A.D.," Knight answered.

Lar Tane and Elda started as though they were puppets on strings. Their eyes slowly widened in disbelief.

"This time you must be lying," Lar Tane said dazedly. "I can't believe it!"

He stared searchingly at Knight, for a sign of mockery. He stared at all their faces, and a staggered look came into his own.

"So it's the truth!" he cried. "5000 A.D. The 50th century. 2000 years beyond our time. Even in our wildest imaginings—"

He composed himself suddenly, with a poise that seemed able to withstand any shock.

"You didn't expect to be buried that long?" Knight asked.

"Not more than a hundred years," Lar Tane said, shaking his head. "Oh, perhaps two or three centuries at the most. We had our vault buried—secretly—a certain distance from the city limits of Vinna. We assumed that within a century or two, the city would creep there, growing, and workmen would uncover it. And we would step out into 3000 or 3100. But the 50th century—"

His head was still shaking.

A brooding pain haunted his eyes.

"I saw Vinna as ruins that saw-toothed the horizon. Vinna was so magnificent, so bright and gay, in my time. Now it's a skeleton."

CHAPTER III

Our Civilization Died!

KNIGHT knew how it must have shaken him. So he had felt when he saw mighty New York laid low, at his awakening.

Lar Tane looked up, speaking sharply.

"What happened in central Europe?

We were taken in oxen-drawn carts from the vault to a primitive village of unlettered people. There was a backward aspect to everything. When the rocket plane came to take us away, I thought sure we would be taken to some center of civilization, wherever it is today. But when we looked down, before landing—"

He waved disdainfully.

Knight knew what he meant.

Soaring down over Manhattan Island, Lar Tane had seen a single power-plant and factory as signs of civilization. North of them, a city in the process of construction. Foundations going up. Open areas that would be the sites of future parks. One building completed, the Capitol, its white stone columns and dome gleaming in the sun. No skyscrapers.

The upper half of the island was just being cleared, emerging from an age-long state of ruin. Far to the north, the skeleton towers of a previous New York still reared, as at the site of ancient Vinna. This was not the great, bustling New York either Knight or Lar Tane had known. It was a ghost, a pitiful caricature.

Knight took a deep breath.

"This is the center of civilization today," he said.

Lar Tane's face was stunned.

"This! A half-built city rising out of ruins?"

Knight nodded, knowing he could not stave off the denouement much longer. Twenty-five years before, Knight had gone through the same crescendo of wonder and stark mental shock. In sympathy, he hoped to soften the brutal blow as much as possible for them. Lead up to it gradually.

It was not easy to awaken from civilization and find the ghost of it. Not easy to find your world knocked out from under you. Not easy to come from a science age and find the Second Stone Age.

"You saw our power-plant," Knight said. "And the adjunct factory and alloy-industry, and the towers of a future radio station. Also my laboratory. The city will be a model one when it's done, without congestion or slums. We're proud of what we've done so far—"

Lar Tane burst in impatiently.

"One power-plant, one factory, one alloy industry, one radio station, one laboratory, one new building. One of everything. And this is the center of civilization!"

His voice became harsh.

"What is the rest of the world like?"

Knight tried to say it, but Lar Tane had already come to his own conclusion.

"The second Dark Age!" he whispered. "You used the term before." He grinned mirthlessly, already gripping himself with a stoic control he seemed to have. "Or the second Stone Age! Isn't that closer to it, Stuart Knight?"

It was a statement, not a question. He went on broodingly.

"I remember now what old Jonz, my science collaborator, said in farewell: He declined interment with us, saying he did not wish to 'see the curtain fall'. I thought he was a senile croaker, but he was right."

He took his daughter's hand.

"Well, Elda. Now that we know, it isn't so bad, is it?"

"There are at least things to do in this kind of world," she responded.

It was an admirable spirit, in both father and daughter, though within must be a hollow ache.

THE girl had spoken her first words —for the ears of history. This would all go down in the meticulous

recordings of Aran Deen, as official historian. He grinned toothlessly as he noticed Stuart and Perry unconsciously straining forward to hear. Her voice had been low and melodious.

"She is beautiful!" the old seer said slyly.

It was no overstatement.

Her iridescent tunic outlined a tall, slender figure of graceful lines and softly-rounded breasts. The arms and legs were bare, molded of ivory. Her features were fine and patrician, framed by a cascade of coppery hair. She was more an exquisite statue, shaped by hands of genius, than human.

But the eyes were most striking. They were green—green as the sea on a misty day, as emerald as dew-dropped sward in quiet woodland.

She spoke again.

"What are the names of those two?" She pointed to the sons of Knight. "And of the others, of course. Introductions should be completed!"

Aran Deen did the honors, assuring himself a larger niche in this corner of history.

"I present to you," he said pompously, "Lady Silva, wife of First Lord Stirnye. Lady Leela of Norak. Lord Stuart, first son of Stirnye."

Purposely, he had left Perry, his protege, to the last. With a flourish of his arm: "And Lord Perry, second son of Stirnye, first scientist of Earth!"

Elda and her father acknowledged the introductions with courtly nods. The girl's eyes slumbrously rested on Stuart, then Perry, then back to Stuart. Momentarily, she darted a glance at Leela's frozen expression. Finally she turned back to the venerable Nartican.

"And you?"

Aran Deen grinned his pleasure, almost ready, grumblingly, to insert himself without the asking.

"Aran Deen, Lord Perry's tutor and assistant, and First Historian of Earth. And may I add, in your own tongue, that you are beautiful? We must give thanks, though uselessly, to the 30th century for bestowing our 50th century with such perfection. And—"

Knight cleared his throat, and Aran Deen reluctantly left another pretty turn of the phrase unsaid. He smiled to himself, however. Who would object, later, if he included it for history, said or unsaid?

Elda Tane smiled dazzlingly.

"You have a quaint manner of using titles," she said seriously, curiously. "You are all Lords and Ladies—but in what sense?"

"Yes," agreed her father. "Do you own, land, estates? Lords. How strange it sounds. Like an echo from feudal days of the Middle Ages."

"Own land?" Aran Deen shrilled. "This man, Stirnye, is First Lord of Earth. I think you would use the term king, or emperor. Stirnye is Emperor of all Earth."

"Emperor of Earth!" Lar Tane gasped. "A man from the 20th century absolute ruler of the 50th century world!"

HIS transfixed stare at Knight held more than surprise. Behind it, strangely, there was a stiffening, a subtle attitude of being on guard.

"Not absolute ruler," Knight explained. "But for the present, I'm the government-head of Earth, in an elastic sense. But all this can be explained at leisure, step by step. And also your reason for leaving your century."

"Lar Tane—Elda—" Aran Deen was muttering reflectively, half to himself. "Those names strike a chord—ancient records—" His voice trailed away in thought.

Lar Tane rubbed his forehead wear-

ily. Beside him, Elda swayed suddenly. Her heavy-lidded eyes drooped.

Stuart made a step toward her, but stopped, staying beside Leela. Perry sprang forward instead, supporting her. Lar Tane had made an aimless gesture to help, himself apparently dizzy.

"It's the after-effects of the awakening," said Knight. "As with me. You need rest."

Neither had said a word of their weakness. Some code of breeding in them forbade any sign of it.

The girl even seemed stung at Perry's sympathetic manner, as he held her. She struggled back suddenly, stood free. She forced a smile to her lips, flinging her head up. She stood there, facing them, while the worst of the spell slowly eased.

The sons of Knight watched her, admiring her bravery.

And with admiration for more than that. In the shadowed light beside the Capitol, her beauty was extravagant. Every lissome curve was enhanced by her spun-glass costume, as clinging as the finest silk. But strength was there, as well as womanliness. She had never lolled daintily in scented boudoirs, living a life of indolence. The carriage of her body spoke of lithe and tigerish grace, as though, like Diana, she had indulged in manly sports.

It was apparent in her face. The exquisite sweetness of her features had changed to determination, as she fought off the spell of weakness. Her eyes glinted with purpose and courage and a complete rejection of their sympathy.

And then, suddenly, as renewed strength came to her, the features softened. In the space of an instant, the hard lines eased. She was again woman, alluring, feminine. The slumbrous eyes smiled, in company with the lips. Her hair sent out shafts of coppery-gold.

Stuart and Perry were staring almost rudely.

"Come," she said airily, tugging at her father's arm. "Let's see something of this strange, new world!"

Five minutes later they both collapsed, in the halls of the Capitol building. Knight put them in the hands of attendants. He was not alarmed. All they needed were rest and sleep.

CHAPTER IV

World on Assembly Block

IN THE following month, Knight spent as many hours as he could spare with his guest from the 30th century, reviewing the past, explaining the present, and discussing the future.

"Twenty-five years ago," he summarized, "I found the world in a state of oligarchy, under Nartica. Right or wrong, I broke that up when the Tribers acknowledged me Lord of Earth because of my science knowledge. My problem then was to put the pieces together again in a better pattern. First power-and-metals, the basis of science. All metal deposits, and coal and oil, had been cleaned out, through the wasteful era of a thousand years, including my time and yours. In your time, Lar Tane, as in mine, men must have warned of that eventual turning point. You were at the verge of the Second Dark Age."

Lar Tane nodded.

"But we were confident that science would find a way out."

"Science did find a way out—too late," Knight said. "An unknown scientist of your time, watching civilization crack apart under the stress of war, preserved his secret for a future age, in a crypt. I found it. His discovery, a tremendously powerful radioactive wax, is the means of boiling away sea-water,

leaving its residue of metal salts. Thus today, we extract metals from the limitless reservoir of the ocean."

He read from a chart.

"A cubic mile of ocean water holds a total mineral wealth of 73 million dollars, in my 20th century terms of money. Eighty-six pounds of gold, ton and a half of silver, and even four ounces of radium. But most important, the metals that build. Iron, copper, aluminum, magnesium. The latter three make an alloy together, superior to steel in all respects. From the sea now we get the foundations of a new civilization. The plant here on Manhattan has been in operation three years."

Knight conducted Lar Tane through it.

Great pumps sucked up sea-water, day and night, running it through a series of sealed vats. In these, the wonder-wax of radioactivity poured down a flood of heat-radiations, boiling away the water. By fractional crystallization, metal salts were extracted one by one, and later reduced to separate metals.*

The by-product steam was led through turbines no different from those of the 20th century, spinning armatures and manufacturing electricity. The rumbling plant was thus the key to Knight's reinstitution of the civilization that had died almost 20 centuries before.

It produced power-and-metals, together. It replaced, singly, all the system of mines and electrical plants of the dead past.

"How is the radioactive wax produced?" Lar Tane queried, deeply impressed. "This unknown scientist's secret? A process of radium bombardment?"

"Yes, on silicon-dioxide—common sand. He left complete data." Knight's voice was practical. "Nartica had radium, all of it, gleaned from city-ruins. Also, they had technicians and skilled workers. I use them both, in the tribal world."

Lar Tane was respectful of the plant, but a question lurked in his eyes.

"Only one plant in operation—after twenty-five years?"

KNIGHT was nettled at his tone.

"You think it easy to build something out of nothing! Remember, I had to devise every part of every apparatus and machine. Nartican industry, though advanced, was based on a system of smelting ores, from their hoarded supplies. Yes, in your time and mine a new plant could be erected almost overnight. But only because of centuries of research and knowledge behind it. The task would have been impossible, in this Stone Age world, except for the initial aid of Nartican industry. And it took twenty-five years to learn how to handle something never before seen on Earth—the super-radioactive wax. How to make it in quantity, by radium bombardment, and then how to apply it.

"Similarly with all the things we took for granted in our day—telephone, telegraph, electric motor, etc. How would you begin, for instance, to construct the simple magnetic-vibrator that re-

* Actually this is the way present-day engineers plan to remove the ocean's wealth from its suspension in the water. However, their methods are simpler; involving a boiling away of the water by heat, and a distillation of the steam, which carries away many elements in gaseous form, and a fractional distillation and separation of the remaining residue. The possibility of obtaining immense quantities of rubber from seaweed has been advanced, but it is also likely that rubber could be produced directly from sea water, from the minute algae that it contains in uncounted billions of pounds. The radioactive wax that is mentioned here is totally unknown today, although it is known that radium salts, mixed with wax, can be regulated as to degree of power and medicinal application to an amazing degree.—Ed.

produces the human voice in a telephone? Tell me, Lar Tane, how would you begin?"

Lar Tane pondered a moment, then conceded the point with a smile.

"I see. It's like making bread when all you have to start with is one wheat-seed. But still, now that one plant is operating successfully, others should be quite easy."

Knight nodded.

"The ice has been broken. Two other plants have just opened. One on the Pacific coast of this continent. One at Gibraltar, in Europe. Another is under construction at the mouth of the Rhine. On the Asiatic coast, a site is being prepared. Within another year, we'll clear a dozen more sites, some in Africa and South America. It's gathering momentum, this building of the sinews of civilization. When enough power-plants and alloy-mills are producing, we'll begin railroads, radio stations, dozens of new cities, and all the rest of it. My son, Stuart, will see something, before he dies, of a humming, busy, worldwide industry, like in your century and mine."

The glow in Knight's voice toned down as he went on.

"Thus with all lesser things resurrected from our lost age. There is one telephone exchange, just a few lines, here on Manhattan. Experimental. One radio station; one telegraph line to the Pacific. And one telegraph spanning Eurasia, powered by the Gibraltar plant. And one city, nearing completion, which will be the model for future cities to spring up all over Earth. Cities planned intelligently, for comfortable life, half arboreal."

A glow had come to Lar Tane's eyes.

"New York playing Athens to the world! It must be a glorious and magnificent feeling, Knight—building a new world!"

Knight smiled tiredly. He pointed to the grey hairs in his head.

"Sometimes it is just a burden," he murmured. "Sometimes I've wondered if I'd get anywhere. It takes so long. There are so many handicaps. What is the hardest thing to handle, in any civilization of any time, Tane?"

The answer came quickly.

"People."

"Yes, people. This is still a stone age, for all I've done. History is made by people, not things. And history pivots around leaders of people. There are not many leaders in the 50th century—not enlightened ones. Gnawing in the back of my mind, from the first, has been the problem of government. Mechanical civilization overnight, perhaps. But the World-State? That can't be conjured out of a bag of scientific tricks."

LAR Tane's interest visibly deepened.

"You are Lord of Earth. Emperor, I'd call it. How do you keep in power? What sort of policing system do you have?"

"None. Individual tribal law is still in force."

Lar Tane's eyes widened.

"But how do you enforce the laws you make?"

"I have made no laws, except one—that there must be no wars over tribal borders. And no metal weapons. They respect that because they know I could defeat any army of theirs."

"I see," nodded Lar Tane. "You rule by threat of force. You have an army ready at any moment to put down insurrection?"

Knight shook his head.

"I've had no organized army at all."

"No weapons, even?"

"None. I've vowed there will never again be war. There is not a lethal

weapon on Earth today, outside of spears and bows used in hunting."

Tane seemed aghast, uncomprehending.

"Without a weapon, without an army, police, or any means of enforcement, you rule Earth? I don't understand. Has no one risen to oppose you?"

"Not so far." Knight smiled strangely. "They look up to me as a half god. Or as a superior being from the fabled, mighty past. The world has been watching me, waiting to see if I would keep my promise of creating a wonderful new place to live in. I've cast a sort of spell over them, I suppose."

His tone changed.

"But it can't last forever. The loose world-federation, under my tacit leadership, must be knit into a strong, united World-State, ruled by itself."

"Ruled by itself?" Lar Tane pondered, as though searching his memory —memory that extended back before his era. "You mean—the principle of democracy?"

He was laughing suddenly. "The experiment that failed! In 2313, the democracy of America vanished, and was never seen again."

"Nevertheless," Knight cut in sharply, "it will be revived, here. Our civilization crashed into oblivion, like Rome, led by dictators into an orgy of war."

He suddenly caught Lar Tane's eye, and his tone became cold.

"There is no room in this world, Lar Tane, for personal ambitions!"

Lar Tane shrugged.

"This is your world, Stuart Knight," he said casually.

Knight put a hand on his shoulder.

"I hope you understand, Tane. We made a mess of civilization last time. Let's not repeat the same mistakes—"

THERE was interruption—a bell ringing.

Knight picked up the phone. It was a crude instrument, clumsy and heavy. It was not the finished, efficient hearing-device the 20th century had known, added to by hundreds of skilled inventors. Neither Knight nor Alexander Graham Bell had done more than fashion the basic principle, in ages 3000 years apart.

The voice that sounded was tinny and distorted, but understandable.

"Lord Stirnye, it is almost time. In an hour we will send the prearranged signal to Lord Perry, at Gibraltar. All the apparatus is working smoothly. Will you come right over?"

Knight hung up after an affirmative.

"Transatlantic radio signals," he explained briefly to Tane. "We've been trying for months. Maybe this time it'll work. Come along."

They walked through the bustle of city construction to the lower tip of the island, where the laboratory workshop jutted against the skyline of New York harbor. Not an inspiring-looking place, but the birthplace of invention supreme, like Edison's Menlo Park in an earlier age.

Knight's nostrils flared, his head high.

From here it was, for twenty-five years, that he had pulled the strings. The backstage of the new civilization, whose real-life scenes were flashing one by one across the footlights of history. Twenty-five years of dreams, and the results of dreams. An invisible network branched from here to all corners of Earth—lines of progress and rule.

No Nero or Alexander had enjoyed such absolute control over so gigantic an empire. No man in all human history had before him so wide an experimental proving ground. The Stone Age lay fallow, ready for the seeds of science, civilization, and a way of life infinitely glorious.

Sometimes it had frightened Knight. He felt like a juggler—one false move and the whole house of cards might tumble down. For more than any one, Knight realized how flimsy, how tenuous was his amorphous, imponderable "empire," not yet grounded in the elements of self-government.

TWO towers reared weirdly against a skyline of ocean and darkening sky, as the sun set. They were structures of interlaced metal, plainted solidly on concrete bases at the southernmost tip of Manhattan Island, overlooking the Atlantic. Between the towers stretched a network of wire strands along which faint ripples of violet danced fitfully. Electricity pulsed through the wires, as once electricity had hummed through all the environs of dead New York.

Stuart Knight had again, after an age, put the electron to work.

"No radio yet!" Lar Tane murmured, as though first realizing that fact.

They looked at each other in a strange sympathy, the two men who had come from an age that knew radio stations all over Earth.

"Historic moment—if it works this time," Knight said phlegmatically. He looked around. "Stuart should be here soon. He's never missed our scheduled attempts."

CHAPTER V

Things Twice Told

AT that moment, Stuart stood with Leela and Elda Tane, their riding clothes dusty.

They overlooked the broad blue Hudson from the upper Manhattan shore. Ruins as yet untouched by workmen bulked grotesquely behind them. Stuart stared moodily at the broken concrete pylon from which had once stretched a mighty bridge to the Jersey shore. The George Washington Bridge, his father had called it.

"A world in ruins," Stuart murmured. "I'm going to rebuild it, when I'm president."

"Still remaking the world?" Elda Tane said airily. "Is there something wrong with this one? There is still sunshine. And fresh air, and horses on which to gallop."

She was a picture of glowing health, her coppery hair wind blown, her eyes sparkling like emeralds against her sun-tinted ivory skin. She was alluring, exotic, patrician. Beside her, Leela seemed pale and fragile.

Standing between them, Stuart was a contrast of vigor and manhood, his keen blue eyes alight with the excitement of their recent ride. Leela was aware of the picture they made together—Stuart and Elda. Two statues of Grecian art come to life. Stiryne had suggested that Stuart and Leela conduct Elda around, in the past month. Leela wished at times he hadn't.

Elda was looking at Stuart. Her bell-voice continued, more seriously. In a month's time, she had easily learned the clipped English of the 50th century.

"But of course it must be done. I wish you could have lived in my time, Stuart. Magnificent cities, great industry, flourishing arts. All of Earth, in our 30th century, was civilized."

"But you had wars, my father says—"

"Oh, yes, wars. But there has to be wars."

"Has to be!" Stuart's voice was low, shocked. He shook his head firmly. "Not in this world. We are building the World-State slowly and carefully, against the need for senseless wars. Your civilization fell because of war-fever, my father says. This one won't."

"Your father says," mimicked Elda.

A hidden gleam of mockery shone from her green eyes. "At least our world wasn't a dull one."

Stuart stared at the girl, puzzled. Hers was a complex personality. She said disturbing things like that at odd times. She was enigmatic, if only because she was a woman. And she was disturbing—in other ways.

"Why did you leave it, then?" he asked a little sharply. "Why did you and your father leave that wonderful time?"

He had thought to make her swallow her words. He was not prepared for her sudden, bitter outburst.

"We were driven! We couldn't stay and be—"

Horror was in her eyes. Then abruptly, in a mercurial change, she was laughing.

"How dramatic I make it sound! It was nothing. I'll let my father explain."

Stuart knew she was hiding something. There was an aura of mystery about the two who had deserted one age for another. They had not left their times purely for scientific principles, as his father had left the 20th century. It was something deeper, more vital.

Elda broke into his thoughts.

"Look. See that leaning tower? I'll race you to it!"

She sprang lightly on her horse, grazing nearby. Her green eyes flashed challenge. Stuart helped Leela mount, then leaped on his own horse. With an exuberant shout, they were off.

Neck and neck the three horses thundered along, till heaps of broken masonry forced the headlong pace down. With daring skill, Elda urged her charger in a flying leap over a tumbled wall, gaining head position. Stuart grinned ruefully. He had thought he was a horseman.

She was an Amazon, her hair streaming out like metallic fluff. She glanced back at times, laughing, mocking, firing his blood. They flew along toward the tower goal, among the piled ruins, courting a broken neck.

Leela fell far behind.

LATER, panting and laughing, they entered the radio laboratory. They had waited for Leela. They sobered at the tense atmosphere within.

It was the interior of a low brick hut nestled between the radio towers. Connecting wires led through the roof to the aerial outside. Harnessed to lead-in wires was a crammed jumble of generators, transformers, bus-bars, vacuum-tubes. All the paraphernalia of radio transmission, in crude form. A bit of 20th century transplanted.

Knight felt that, seated before a panel of switches. Almost like the control room of a broadcasting station of his time. Among the apparatus was his staff of helpers, watching dials and voltmeters with hawk eyes. An air of tense expectancy rode over the hum and drone of apparatus. Something from the dead past was being resurrected.

Would it work?

It was not so easy, as Knight had told Lar Tane, to re-invent the machine marvels of the science age, starting at zero.

A large clock hung on the wall, one of Knight's first productions. Its hands crept to the hour of six. Knight poised his fingers over the telegraphic key before him. His hand trembled a little.

AT the precise moment, he depressed the key. Three times he pressed down, in short "dots." He paused. Then three times again—a pause—three times—a pause. . . .

Outside, in obedience to his finger, the aerial crackled invisibly with triple-surges of energy. The three-dot signal hurled itself, by short-wave, out over

the broad Atlantic.

After a minute of the signalling, Knight stopped, and fitted earphones to his head. He closed the receiver switch and turned up the power dial. Then he listened, pressing the earphones tightly against his ears. All he heard, for a minute, was the howling of static.

Then it came.

Three sharp dots, a pause—three dots—a pause. . . .

Clear as a bell it sounded. Knight removed the earphones and plugged in a horn-speaker.

Ping-ping-ping — ping-ping-ping — ping-ping-ping. . . .

It rang through the hum-filled room loudly.

Knight listened as if to some divine music. It was just the letter "S," in code, broadcast from Europe across the ocean. It faded at times, and at times the demon-howls of static obscured it. But Knight listened with a choked wonder.

Three thousand years before, a long-dead inventor had carried out this precise experiment. It was a reenactment of Marconi, listening to the letter "S" hurled from the far shores of another continent.

But Marconi had not realized, save dimly, that this whisper of man's voice across the ocean would grow to a shouting chorus, shrinking the world. Knight, reviving this feat, knew it as a milestone in the budding science of the 50th century.

He knew, standing and listening raptly, that it was another bond to unite mankind.

Back of him, the dozen technicians smiled tiredly but happily at one another. They had helped bring about the success of the project, through months of intensive labor. Yet they looked with awe at Knight. His brain and 20th century knowledge had been the prime factor. Without him, the 50th century wouldn't have this, or the long list of other inventions flowing from him in the past quarter-century.

"It is a stupendous achievement, Lord Stirnye!" said a blonde-skinned Nartican. "We had nothing like it in Nartica."

"Magic! It is near to that," murmured a darker Triber. "Lord Stirnye has the mind of a god!"

Knight thrilled. For twenty-five years he had been looked up to as almost a super-being. He turned back to the key, and began tapping in the international code of his century.

"Y-o-u-r 'S' s-i-g-n-a-l r-e-c-e-i-v-e-d c-l-e-a-r-l-y. C-o-n-t-a-c-t s-u-c-c-e-s-s-f-u-l. C-o-m-e b-a-c-k t-o-m-o-r-r-o-w t-o d-i-s-c-u-s-s a-p-p-a-r-a-t-u-s f-o-r v-o-c-a-l t-r-a-n-s-m-i-s-s-i-o-n.

K-n-i-g-h-t."

Almost instantly the signal came back.

"O-K d-a-d."

"O.K."—Knight had revived that too, from the 20th century.

As he turned away, Lar Tane was the first to offer congratulations.

"Radio transmission will give the world a voice, like in our times. And before this, you invented the telegraph, telephone, X-ray, electric motor, electric light, and all the other things I saw. I realize now what a remarkable feat it is, condensing centuries of inventions into twenty-five years."

Knight shook his head.

"Not invented—re-invented. Better minds than mine devised these things. I'm just handing them on. I'm a super-Edison only by proxy.

"In time, all those things of our day will gradually spread out among mankind today. It's still a Stone Age. Twenty-five years is such a short time. I've only been able to devise the first of the inventions. We haven't the fac-

Knight listened as if to some divine music

tories yet to spread them widely. But we're laying the foundations for a new and wonderful world."

Stuart looked at the visionary light in his father's eyes, this man who saw things in such great sweeps.

"But you've been driving yourself too much, father! Hardly sleeping or eating. You should take time to rest—"

"Time!"

Knight spoke the word as though it were a net cast about him. As though his every thought and impulse was a race against the clock.

"Time is infinitely precious, to me. So many things from my 20th century must be passed along. And I have only one lifetime. I'm all right—"

BUT even as he said it, Knight stiffened. His face paled. He clutched at the panel board for support, then collapsed on the floor. Stuart knelt beside him with a muffled cry of alarm.

A doctor was hurriedly summoned. A Nartican, he had been their family physician for a decade. One glance at the still face and he took out a hypodermic, injecting below the heart.

Knight came to, gasping. When he was breathing easily again, he smiled weakly, arising. He looked at the silent, anxious faces about him.

"Just a twinge of the heart," he said lightly. "After all, I'm three thousand years old!"

But Knight did not tell what the doctor had told him a year before. The electro-lepsis that had brought him through an age had left its mark. A heart that had stopped beating for 3000 years and then resumed, might at any moment stop again—forever.

But still, it had been a day of triumph.

THE next day, despite weakness, Knight insisted on going over plans for voice-radio. Perry and Aran Deen had returned from Gibraltar, by plane. When they reached a knotty problem, Lar Tane made a helpful suggestion.

Engrossed in the problem, they hardly noticed that Stuart and Elda had entered, with Leela.

Elda's green eyes flashed.

"You're remaking the world now, too?" she said half banteringly to her father. "I've become interested myself. Stuart told me today of the Magna Charta, which was adopted last month. In fact, the day we arrived."

"Not adopted, but ratified for adoption," corrected Stuart, smiling.

"I don't understand these democratic methods." The girl was frankly puzzled, and somewhat amused. "Conventions, congress, debate, vote, ratification—it all seems slow and ponderous. In our time—"

She exchanged glances with her father. Lar Tane's eyes were reminiscent. He made an involuntary gesture, as though imitating a ruler of his time—to signify a new edict.

He faced Knight.

"Magna Charta?"

Knight nodded. He explained in brief phrases.

"It is a document," he concluded, "passing government into the hands of a World Congress."

Lar Tane was staring.

"And on the day it's finally ratified—"

"On that day, five months from now," Knight said, "I am no longer Lord of Earth. My title, and all it has meant, passes into history. But Stuart will be the first president of the World Congress. I requested that, and I know it will be granted as my final wish."

Elda's eyes were on Stuart.

"You will be ruler of Earth, then?"

"Only a constitutional ruler," Stuart

responded quickly. "My father will still be my guide. Then, within my lifetime, all the legislative powers of the Congress will be defined. The World-State will gather momentum. A slow process, but a certain one. The final result—true democracy."

Stuart's calm, sure tones rang through the room. He added, as if in afterthought, "I shouldn't forget my brother. Perry will be my right-hand man, building and spreading science and industry through the world."

Perry flushed under the attention. Elda's lidded eyes flicked to him, then back to Stuart.

"But you," she murmured again, "will be ruler of Earth!"

"You are rebuilding civilization," Lar Tane said to Knight. "You and your two sons. In some way, Elda and I can help." He smiled curiously. "As a matter of fact, though we once had a secure place, we now have to earn a living!"

KNIGHT felt again his kinship with them. He, too, had awakened with a new life to begin.

"Why did you leave your time?" he asked. For a month, busy explaining the new world, he had not thought to ask. Lar Tane had volunteered nothing.

"There was a World State or World Empire in your time," piped the voice of Aran Deen. "I remember that, though I can't find the exact record. It cracked apart, in five years, through war. The year it ended, 2907, was the year you were interred. Is that right, Lar Tane?"

Tane nodded.

"Yes, I remember too," Knight mused. He had made it a point to read all the historical records in the libraries of Nartica. He knew the history between the 20th and 50th centuries in broad detail. "The third evanescent World State. Based on the principle of military power, like the others, it fell apart, rotten to the core."

"And were you a high government official?" pursued Aran Deen vaguely. "Lar Tane—the name sticks in my mind."

Tane's face was blank.

"No. Not a high official, though I was in the government. When the World-State of 2907 crashed, I took the door to the future, hoping to find it reformed in a better pattern. It was my sole reason for passing into suspended animation. I'm wholeheartedly with you in forming a World-State today."

His eyes were suddenly shining.

"A new world! Rebuilding civilization! I feel almost as though fate had planned this, Stuart Knight. How can I serve? I was a scientist as well as administrator. Tell me, how can I serve?"

His manner was suddenly impatient, hurried, as though his dynamic nature, shrugging off the last shreds of age-long sleep, demanded activity.

Knight's eyes were reflective. Lar Tane, despite his former life in a century where might was right, was a valuable man. One thing he had in common with Knight—a view of world affairs through a perspective of time. That alone was a priceless gift, second only to Knight's greater range.

"Yes, rebuilding civilization," Knight said slowly. "And the World-State. And in that, Lar Tane, your experience is invaluable." He came to a mental conclusion. "I hereby appoint you director of the Rhine powerplant, in Europe. I'm sure you'll prove your worth, and be elected to an important post in the new government."

Lar Tane bowed slightly, looking pleased.

CHAPTER VI

Listen, Stone Age!

A WEEK later, a sailing vessel denuded of its sails but with masts and ropes intact for emergency, fared from New York harbor under steam. The spectators at the dock hardly realized the significance of the name painted on the prow—*Dogstar II*.

An age before, in 1838, another *Dogstar* had made the first Atlantic crossing under steam, from England to America. And the *Dogstar* of 5000 A.D. would also stamp the sailing vessel with the word "obsolete." Mark the close of a sailing era, usher in a steamship age. Pump the blood of trade vigorously through the arteries of the world.

Knight blessed fate, that allowed him to witness these twice-told events.

Sometimes the wonder of it shook him. It was as though he had been plucked from tottering Earth entirely, in the 20th century, and placed by the gods in a new Earth, once again back in the Stone Age. It was as though the gods had said: "The first experiment failed. We will start all over, before civilization. You, Stuart Knight, guide this second one. With what you know of the past, you know the pitfalls. Do well!"

And then it was as though the gods laughed behind his back, and said among themselves: "He is such an optimistic, energetic little worm-that-dreams. He thinks he will succeed. He does not know the storm may break at any moment!"

Knight didn't know why he had that last thought. During the quiet, restful voyage across an ocean that seemed bent to please, he reviewed the past twenty-five years. It was the first time he had really stopped his bustle and drive, and sat down to think it over, with the perspective of those years.

All had gone well.

Power-and-metals were once again at hand, to muscle the stricken body of civilization, give it vigor and life. Mechanical inventions, culminating in radio and this steam-driven vessel, were once more ready to form its arms and legs and voice. The Magna Charta would soon breathe into it a heart and soul.

Yes, all had gone well.

But—

And suddenly, Knight knew what ticked in his brain. It must have the latter, or the rest would mean nothing. Knight had dug into the grave of the past, patching the new world-body together. Without heart and soul—without the Magna Charta—the new civilization would be a Frankenstein monster, laying waste the world again in war and chaos.

Knight knew he would not feel at ease till the World-State was safely launched. Five months more and then the gods would nod their heads and stop laughing behind his back.

THE *Dogstar Second's* new engine worked like a clock.

Shining alloy casings hid the great pistons that thrust powerfully, turning the four-bladed screw. Five years before Knight and his son Perry had started its construction. Effort well spent.

Knight was always a little amazed himself at the "fuel." It consisted simply of a few large lumps of the miraculous radioactive wax. Releasing infra-energy far out of proportion to its size, it churned an endless head of steam through the engine, as long as water was supplied. A few pounds of the wax were equal to hundreds of tons of coal. It was more than combustion

that the wax underwent—it was disintegration. The 20th century would have called it radioactivity speeded up—or "Atomic Energy!"

"And the cost of producing this amount of wax," Knight told Lar Tane, "was less than a hundred dollars, in financial terms. Freighters crossing the Atlantic for less than what used to be a docking charge!"

Knight was almost childishly pleased at the wondering look on Lar Tane's face. It was the sign of a new and vaster science that the 50th century would inherit.

THE *Dogstar II* docked in the harbor of what had once been Gibraltar, beneath its frowning ramparts. It picked its way majestically among sail-driven craft. Sailors' faces stared in astonishment at the swift ship driven by hidden magic, not aware yet that their age-long craft were outmoded. In the harbor town a crowd of Tribers quickly collected, staring in wonder.

Knight noticed they did not cheer. The news of both the Magna Charta and the steamship, though sped to Europe by the new radio, was yet too novel for them to accept unreservedly, as in America. The tribal-states of America, closer to the center of the new things, and better informed, were the only ones already in line, wholeheartedly.

"The first crossing of the Atlantic under steam, in this age," Knight said in commemoration. "They will accept it soon for the great event it is."

The party made its way to the radio station, beyond the town, where several aircraft lay ready for service.

Knight pointed to one.

"This will take you, Lar Tane and Elda, to Vinna. Chief Hal Doth, at my request, offers you the hospitality of his house. I thought you would prefer to live there, for the time being, at the site if not the city you once knew."

"It's thoughtful of you," Lar Tane returned sincerely. He added, in a reminiscent murmur: "Vinna!"

"The plane," Knight resumed, "is at your service. Refueling facilities at the Rhine. You can commute to the Rhine powerplant in an hour, from Vienna, and apportion your time there as you wish. In two months the plant should be completed. It will then need a capable director. I leave it to your judgment to build its productive capacity to a peak. We are ready to launch an industrial program."

Knight turned to his eldest son.

"As we've decided, Stuart, you'll stay here in Europe, perhaps for the five months. The tribal-states of America will ratify the Magna Charta without question. But many of the outlying states here in Europe are uncertain, suspicious. Circulate among then, explaining. At the same time"—he grinned briefly—"you'll be campaigning for yourself as president."

Stuart nodded seriously.

Knight faced his second son.

"Perry, you and Aran Deen will stay here and continue work on the radio. Also have your staff of technicians begin turning out rails for the railroad across Eurasia."

There was a vivid picture in Knight's mind of a day two years before. Gleaming rails from the east and west meeting, spanning the American continent once again. Union Pacific played for the 50th century. A rattly, clanking little train crossing in record time—at least for the second Stone Age.

Perry nodded.

Knight turned again to Lar Tane and Elda.

"I'm returning to New York, to pre-

pare for inauguration of the World-State. At any time you wish, visit me by plane—if you feel lonesome."

It was more than an amenity on Knight's part. He had felt lonesome in the new world for months, after his awakening, till events had swept him up.

Elda smiled.

"Perhaps we shall be lonesome. Will you visit us at times, Stuart?" She flashed her eyes on him questingly.

"As often as I have time," Stuart's voice was low.

"You also, Perry," Elda said, with a code of courtesy of her time that made exception to no one. She glanced at him, smiling, "Or does science command complete devotion?"

"Too much so," old Aran Deen spoke up. "I have known him to work three days and nights running. He is a young fool." Shaking his head, the venerable seer subsided into a mumble.

Knight waved.

"When we all gather again in New York, it will be at the dawn of the World-State!"

A moment later, three planes rocketed into the air and soared off into the distance. One to America, one to ancient Vienna, and the last toward inner tribal regions along the Mediterranean.

Perry watched them vanish.

"What are you thinking of?" queried Aran Deen slyly. "Green eyes?"

Perry started, and turned away wordlessly.

The old seer glanced up in the sky.

"Young fools," he mumbled.

IT TOOK the droning rocket plane no more than two hours to take Stuart a distance of 1000 miles. Three Narticans were with him, as pilot and mechanics. He was visiting a tribal-state in what had once been Italy.

The pilot arrowed down over the main village. A collection of wooden and brick huts centered around a more imposing structure of rough-cut marble, graced with a crude steeple. The plane landed in the square before the chief's dwelling, its underjets cushioning it down lightly.

A crowd gathered swiftly, staring with curious eyes at the great metal bird. They had seen planes before, but only at rare intervals. Before his father's advent, the Nartican feudal lords had come at times for food and slaves.

Stuart and his men stepped out.

The crowd stared in a mixture of awe and wonder. Second Stone Age people they were, hardened by outdoor labors, clothed in rough, baggy woolens. Yet here and there gleamed a metal belt-clasp, or a steel hunting knife, or a chain of iron-filigree around a girl's throat. Twenty-five years ago, Knight had smelted iron from the oxide-heaps of city ruins. The secret had gone around.

Pathetic bits of metal, but they marked the dawn of a metal age.

From the steepled building came the chief and his chieftains. They wore silken sashes around their middles. There had been some trade with Nartica. The dawn, too, of world commerce.

Stopping before the visitors, they inclined their heads deferentially.

"Welcome, Lord Stuart, first son of Lord Stirnye!"

Stuart had never been here before. By word of mouth alone, the "royal" family was known with almost the clarity of television, all over the world. And always the Tribers were respectful. They feared the man who had come from the mighty past.

Respect they had. But did they un-

derstand anything of the new civilization planned? The World-State?

Stuart nodded gravely, in turn.

"Chief Ral Harn, of Venz," he said.

He had records of all tribes and chiefs. It pleased them to know their names.

"My table and food are yours," invited the chief.

Stuart declined with thanks. Ceremony over, he launched into his mission.

"Tell me why your tribe, and those hereabouts, objected at first to sending delegates to a convention in America?"

The chief started a little.

"It was so far away," he replied hesitantly.

"But it was so important," Stuart pursued. "In the paper called the Magna Charta, my father, Lord Stirnye, gives up rule of Earth. Will your tribe vote for it?"

STUART watched the man closely. In his reaction might lie important considerations. The chief spoke after an evasive pause.

"Why is Lord Stirnye giving up his rule? We have never found fault with him."

"Because the government of mankind must pass into its own hands."

"But *who* will rule?" the chief asked bluntly. In his Stone Age psychology, there had to be single fountainhead of authority.

"You and all other chiefs," Stuart put it as simply as he could. "All the delegates from all the tribes will make laws together, by vote. If I am wanted and elected, I will be the president. Or chief."

Ral Harn nodded.

"That is good." Then he looked down at the ground. "But all the laws will come from America?"

That was the rub. Stuart couldn't blame him. Absentee government, from across an ocean, would instinctively be mistrusted. Nartica had held sway from a distance. Rome too, in the dim past. Stuart made a mental note to think over a yearly change of the government's seat. Perhaps there could be a dozen Capitols over Earth, each the meeting place of the Congress in turn.

"No," Stuart said. "They will come from the hearts of the men whom you tribal chiefs send to law-making."

Sheer rhetoric, but it pleased the chief. But still he gave no promise to vote for the new regime. Stuart opened his mouth, then thought better of it. Another form of persuasion remained. He signaled his men.

From the cabin of the plane they lugged several batteries, and two phones. Stuart handed one to the chief, with instructions how to hold it. A Nartican took the other instrument and walked a hundred feet away, uncoiling the connecting wire.

"Listen," Stuart told the chief, waving a signal to the Nartican to talk.

Ral Harn listened in utter amazement.

"It talks!" he gasped.

The crowd around murmured in awe.

"And you can talk to him," Stuart said. "Tell him to step to the right."

"Step to the right!" the chief bellowed, loud enough to be heard without the phone. Stuart got him to speak in lower tones. In obedience to his commands, the Nartican beyond took three steps forward, waved his right arm, and stood on one leg.

"Magic!" whispered the chief.

"Not magic," Stuart said. "Science. There are many more things—"

The demonstrations went on. An electric-light bulb was lighted, dazzling even in the daylight. A small electric

fan threw cooling gusts of air in the chief's face. Finally a scratchy phonograph record was played, one of those from Knight's crypt. The majestic tones of a 20th century symphony rolled over the crowd's head.

As his men packed the instruments back, Stuart faced the chief.

"These are the things of science. There are many more. They will be spread throughout the world. But first there must be the World-State. Will you vote for it now?"

Glimpse into another world. Had it impressed the chief? His eyes were shining.

But his reply was canny.

"My chieftains and I will give it deep thought. But I cannot understand why Lord Stirnye is giving up his rule!"

Stuart bit his lip. Back where he started from!

AT THE next tribal-state, his reception was less cordial. Chief Kor Lugi of Thoom was a loud-voiced ruffian with a defiant air. He came right to the point.

"No!" My tribe will not vote for the World-State." His voice was a bellow. "I would no longer be chief, then."

"But you would," Stuart returned patiently. "Your council of chieftains and yourself would still make your own tribal laws. Only certain edicts for the benefit of all Earth will come from the Congress. Like the edict, already proclaimed by Lord Stirnye, forbidding border war."

Stuart had touched a sore spot.

"No border wars!" roared the chief. "That is our business. The crafty Venz people graze their cattle in our fields, thus taking over some of our land. I should have the right to drive them off."

"Those things will be straightened out by the World Congress." Honesty forced Stuart to add, "In time."

"And I should wait, while my cattle grow thin." The chief shook his head like an angry bull. "The quicker way is to gather my young men and teach the sneaking Venz a lesson. A few burned villages would make them think."

"Well, why don't you?" Stuart challenged guardedly. And in curiosity.

"Because I respect Lord Stirnye." The burly chief's tone went down a peg. "He freed us from Nartica. And for fear of him, our bitterest enemies, to the north, have left our borders intact."

For *fear* of Lord Stirnye, magician from the mighty past! Stuart's own respect for his father went up, for silencing a world of quarrels just by the threat of hidden powers. But did they have no regard for the civilization he was bringing?

Chief Kor Lugi stared cynically as the mechanical gadgets were displayed.

"I will have nothing to do with them," he grunted. "Let Lord Stirnye rule, but let him not change our way of living."

Stuart fled from the sheer stupidity of it. The next tribal chief had a new and novel angle of objection.

"It is a plot to put Nartica in control again," he accused. "Lord Stirnye has surrounded himself with Narticans. He married one. And you, his son, come with Narticans. No, we will not vote for this World-State—or for slavery to Nartica!"

Stuart groaned and wondered what fantastic suspicion the next tribe would have. Surprisingly, they had none. They were enthusiastically in favor of the World-State. A cheering candle in the gloom of the second Stone Age.

But subsequent tribes were again intractable, obstinate. Stuart began to feel like a mad preacher. Was it too

soon to bring the Tribers, steeped in their tribal traditions, a mode of self-government?

Was the Magna Charta a worthless scrap of paper?

CHAPTER VII

In Olden Days

A MONTH passed.

Stuart returned periodically to the Gibraltar base for fuel, and continued his penetration of tribal-states inland. He reported to his father, by radio, when he felt he had something definite to say.

Perry tapped out the words for him.

"Visited most of the tribal-states in southern Europe." Stuart's voice was weary. "Some refuse outright to ratify, most are suspicious. Strangely, they see no reason why you shouldn't continue as Lord of Earth. They seem blind to the idea of a World Congress."

Knight's reply was practical.

"Stone Age psychology. One-man rule is the only form they've known. They forget how many times in the past their separate chiefs have been cruel, ruthless, rapacious."

Almost, the clicking code seemed to sigh.

"Perhaps it is still too early, though I've waited twenty-five years. But there must be a World-State before there is world science and industry. Two-thirds of the tribal-states are all we need for ratification. With all of America and Nartica, and half of Europe, we'll have it. You can swing half of Europe, Stuart."

Stuart turned away from the radio with set determination.

"It is not so easy, is it?" cackled old Aran Deen acidly. "I have often told Stirnye it wouldn't be. I've also often told him Perry—"

He stopped, peering at the two young men with searching eyes, then shrugged.

"I'd like to help," Perry said earnestly. "But I'd be no good. Crowds scare me."

Stuart smiled.

"You're lucky, Perry. You deal with tangible things. I'm working with the imponderables of human nature. But I'll swing half of Europe!"

"Sure you will. And look, Stu." Perry indicated his experimental apparatus. "Soon we'll have voice transmission across the Atlantic. When you're president, you'll speak to the world, after stations have been set up, without dashing around madly like now."

Stuart grasped his younger brother's hand, suddenly.

"We're building a whole new world," he said soberly. "Nothing must ever come between us."

"Nothing will," Perry agreed.

Stuart's voice changed.

"Any news from Lar Tane and Elda?"

"None."

That wasn't surprising, in a Stone Age without telephone, telegraph or radio, except for experimental types.

"I'll visit them," Stuart decided, striding for his plane.

"Green eyes," mumbled old Aran Deen to himself.

Green eyes greeted Stuart as he stepped from the plane, three hours later.

"Stuart!" Elda held out her soft hand. "You have delayed your first visit."

Spun-copper hair, ivory skin, eyes that flashed like emeralds—she was outrageously lovely.

Stuart broke from a spell of staring, pulling his hand away.

"Not willingly," he said a little perfunctorily.

He stiffened in surprise, staring beyond her.

THERE was bustle and activity beyond the landing runway. A huge squat building at the mouth of the Rhine housed the new powerplant, as on Manhattan. It would feed metals and electricity to northern Europe, eventually. For a year, Nartican machine-parts and technicians had been shuttling from that distant land. But the plant was already in operation! The pumps sucked in sea-water. From within sounded the rumble of machinery. Clouds of steam hissed from vents. Metals and electrical power were being produced.

"The plant is under production?" Stuart gasped. "A month ahead of schedule?"

"It started yesterday. My father does not waste time."

"But how did he do it?"

"He'll tell you." Elda led the way within a trim brick cottage set off from the workmen's quarters. It was Lar Tane's office. With a terse word of greeting, he held up a bar of silvery alloy. One end had been ground to a cutting edge.

"Our first extraction from the sea," he said enthusiastically. "Iron is rare in the sea metals. But this alloy of copper, magnesium and aluminum is lighter and stronger than steel."

He crunched the cutting edge down on a block of hard wood on his desk. The block split in half.

"My father's formula," Stuart nodded. "He worked it out years ago. But Lar Tane"—he faced the short, stocky man—"how did you get the plant started so soon?"

"Well, I conscripted more laborers from the surrounding tribal-state. Nelland, I believe it's called, a curious contraction of the Netherland state of my time. I put them all on a longer shift, finishing the building. The Nartican technicians, too, with their assembling of machine-parts." His voice was casual. "I believe in getting things done."

"I guess you do," Stuart murmured. He did not quite know how to take it. "But we always found it hard to hustle the average Triber worker."

"Simple enough. I promised them metal trinkets. Do you realize that metal is like rare diamonds to these Stone Age people?"

Stuart knew he was frowning a little.

"We've had a certain policy, in drafting the Tribers for our projects. Short hours, no driving, and payment only in useful manufactured goods from Nartica. This Stone Age has no money system—only barter and trade. My father says a money-system must not arise before the World Congress takes control. Those metal trinkets—"

Stuart remembered one of his father's comparisons, of a bygone era. White men trading beads with the Indians, and thereby throwing rocks into the future.

Lar Tane and Elda had exchanged glances.

Lar Tane spoke calmly.

"I've heard something of your policy, in the past month, talking with Narticans. I wonder if your methods haven't been too slow? The telegraph line across Eurasia was once held up for five months, when the Tribers refused to go on with it. You waited patiently till they stopped sulking—too patiently. How can industry be spread at that rate?"

STUART pondered. It was logic—or was it? Again he remembered one of his father's impassioned speeches. "I came from a time when all things were forced. A madness lay upon the world. Each nation, or community, or

business group madly attempted to outdo the other. Wolflike competition, in all phases of life. That spirit must never rise again. Never!"

Lar Tane was from a time like that.

Stuart was suddenly angry.

"My father will be the judge of that," he snapped. "Hereafter, you will communicate with him on such matters."

Lar Tane stiffened. For a moment a haughty, almost imperious expression came over his features. Elda put a hand on his arm, with a low murmur in the German tongue of their time.

Lar Tane relaxed.

"Yes. After all, Stuart Knight is Lord of Earth." There was a strange undertone in his voice. Then he smiled.

"*Ach!* We quarrel over nothing, my young friend. Come, we will leave. You will be my guest for a day or so, at Vinna. I want to hear of your campaigning."

"You look tired, Stuart," Elda said sympathetically, as though attributing his outburst to nerves. "Not physically—mentally. Will you join me in a boar-hunt tomorrow? It's great sport."

Stuart's anger dissolved. These at least were people he could reason with. And whose company he could enjoy.

A rocket plane took them toward central Europe.

Just before landing, they passed over the ruins of ancient Vinna. In the 30th century, records said, it had enjoyed another hey-day, as before 1914. For a while, it had been the cultural, scientific, and ruling center of a crawling empire. Then total eclipse, as the Second Dark Age fell. Now its once-mighty skyscrapers and magnificent architecture were like the bare bones of a desert skeleton. Here a leaning spire of rust-clothed but stubborn steel. There a heap of rotting marble. . . .

"Vinna!" Lar Tane murmured reminiscently. Stuart could appreciate his nostalgia somewhat, from the times his father had sighed, haunted by the dead past.

Some three miles beyond the ruins, on the banks of the Danube, existed now the "capital" of a Second Stone Age tribal-state—Vinna. A miserable village it was, like the many Stuart had toured.

Or had been! Stuart saw it had a cleaned up aspect now. Bright red paint livened the usual dun huts.

Lar Tane was watching him.

"My idea," he said. "Common red paint—from the iron-oxide of the ruins—but it touches things up nicely. Chief Hal Doth is pleased. He looks up to me, I think."

It was apparent when they landed. Chief Hal Doth almost fawned. He was proud of having been the one to resurrect this great "lord from the past." And it set him apart from the other Triber chiefs to have him as a permanent guest. Stuart reflected vaguely that in a short month Lar Tane had already worked out a niche for himself, in a new and bewildering world. He was a hustler.

THEY dined together and Lar Tane told of life in his century, in rich, colorful language. There was something magnetic, compelling, about Lar Tane. Or perhaps it was just his gifted tongue. It seemed almost like a spell, to Stuart.

Later, Elda heightened the spell, by singing in a low, melodious voice. She accompanied herself on a three-stringed lyre of 50th century vintage. The effect was magical.

"I walk in the towers;
They call me the queen!
But what says my heart?
Of love does it keen!

I rule all the regions,
  I bow down to none;
Yet triumph is empty
  If love isn't won.

This crown and this sceptre,
  I wear them and sigh;
My love I'll find somewhere
  Before I must die!"

Stuart went to a bed of dreams about the incredible world of a vanished past. And dreams of a strange girl who sang plaintively under a sad moon.

CHAPTER VIII

Diana Reborn

IN the morning, more refreshed than he had been for weeks, Stuart accepted Elda's invitation to the boar hunt. They rode on two powerful chargers, at the head of six Triber hunters.

It was an enchanted day. Stuart's eyes strayed often to the girl beside him, as they trotted along. Her brief costume of Nartican shorts and shirt of silk, which she had adopted, left her arms and legs bare. Across her shoulders were hung a bow and quiver of arrows. She held a flint-tipped spear with a practiced touch.

Yesterday singing an ancient love-song, like any girl. Today bound on the hunt, like any man. Hers was a complex personality!

"You miss the guns of your day?" Stuart queried.

He had unlimbered his bow, tested its string, and now sent an arrow toward a lone tree they were passing by a good margin. The shaft missed, but clipped off bark. He was a little out of practice from his younger days.

Elda shook the coppery flame of her head.

"I despised guns. I always used spear and bow, in hunting."

Calmly she fitted an arrow to her bow, raised herself in the saddle, and let fly. The arrow spanged into the center of the tree trunk.

"Good shot," Stuart said, avoiding the mockery in her eyes.

"I think you were about to tell me boar-hunting was dangerous," she laughed.

At the edge of a wild, somber woods they waited together while the six Tribers circled and rode in as beaters. They did not have long to wait. A wild boar nosed out of the woods, winded them, and scurried down the edge of the clearing. Their horses thundered after. The hunted animal scuttled back for the woods. Elda wheeled her horse quicker than Stuart, and was after it. She leaned over and plunged down her spear, before the trees became too thick.

She missed. She retrieved the spear and came back.

"My horse shied at the wrong time," she panted, dismounting. "I'll do better on foot."

"But that's—" began Stuart.

"Dangerous?" Elda laughed.

Stuart dismounted, and stood beside her.

"These devils aren't tame," he said tersely. "Keep near a tree."

If he thought she would, for safety's sake, he was wrong. She was after the second boar that appeared, like the Diana of ancient Greek mythology. Stuart admired the lithe, easy grace of her flying limbs, then leaped after her. With a burst of speed he passed her and flung his spear first. It was a bad cast, nicking the boar's shoulder.

The animal turned on them with snarling grunts of rage. Tusks gleaming, it charged. Stuart knew the girl wouldn't go for a tree. And neither would he. He whipped out an arrow and

let fly. It stuck upright in the flank, without effect on the boar save to drive it utterly berserk. Stuart had no more time except to sidestep swiftly.

The clumsy beast pounded on, straight for Elda!

She stood with feet planted solidly, half crouched forward, spear back for a cast. Stuart watched paralyzed. If she cast and missed, she would have no time to sidestep the enraged animal.

"Elda, run! You can't—"

Stuart thought of an arrow, but might hit her. There wasn't a thing he could do except watch, his nape crawling.

Elda's arm came forward, with all the impetus of her shoulders. Straight and true the spear went, impaling the boar's heart between its shoulders. It stumbled, staggered, and dropped three feet in front of the girl. She jerked the weapon out, calmly wiping its point on the grass.

But excitement flashed from her green eyes, as Stuart ran up.

"Your face says you expect me to faint," she said mockingly. She drew herself up. "Disappointed? I'm not your Leela, you know."

Stuart said nothing. He said nothing all the way back to the village. He shut out the confusion in his mind firmly. Wasn't there enough to think about, with his presidential campaign?

HE told Lar Tane of that, as they dined of fresh boar meat that evening.

"I'm begininng to wonder," he concluded moodily, "if I'll swing half of Europe."

"I think your method is wrong," Lar Tane said bluntly. "It's like coaxing children with a little candy. It should be done on a large scale, if at all. I mean a parade, for instance. A parade will sway the masses surprisingly."

Stuart frowned. A parade—echo from the 20th century and 30th! Hadn't his father once denounced it as a showy, emotional method of intriguing the masses? The masses! That was another word with a bad flavor.

"Lar Tane," Stuart bristled, "the people are not to be *tricked* into it. They must understand and believe."

"If they can," Tane said evenly. "You're an idealist, like your father."

"My father was an idealist when he told Nartica their oligarchy must end. He convinced them!"

"Smashing things is easy. Putting the pieces together again is the hard part." Lar Tane arose. "You have four months, to put the pieces together —by *your* plan."

Stuart pondered that, as his plane took him to the southern states of Europe. Did Lar Tane have some other plan? A better one? Was it possible that Stirnye, whose name would ring down in history for rallying a world toward a new goal, did not know how to put the pieces together again? Was he *fumbling*, perhaps?

Stuart cursed the sudden doubts in his mind. Confusion! It did not help to think of emerald-eyed Elda, and how she had mocked him. And made his blood boil. In rage, of course.

Another month entered the maw of Time.

Back in New York, Stirnye, Lord of Earth, began to count off the days and months. Three more months and the World-State would be born. The oppressive burden on his weary shoulders would lift. And the gods would stop mocking.

STUART'S regular report came by code over the radio, from the Gibraltar station.

"A bloc of states along the Mediterranean are assured. They've had trade with Nartica, and have a world outlook.

But inland states, quite isolated, are suspicious. It's ironic!

"They can't seem to grasp the fundamentals of democracy. They hint that tribal independence is most desired. They may riot, against the edicts of a World Congress. Or even secede! Only your name, when mentioned, commands respect. They remember vividly the threats you made—to gather an army and with mighty powers of the 20th century crush all opposition. I begin to wonder, father. What troubles will the World-State face, when it is formed, pledged to never use force?"

Knight replied carefully.

"As president, Stuart, you will be commander-in-chief of a world policing system. Riots must be put down firmly. Deep-seated tribal dissatisfactions must be taken before a Council of Tribal Adjustment. Once a precedent has been established, justly, they will see that force need never be used to settle things."

"Yes, but shouldn't we organize the policing system now? On election day, the rioting may spread like a flame."

Knight pondered.

"Yes, perhaps. I'll have the Narticans ready. You continue as you have, Stuart."

Knight turned from the radio, and patted Leela's hand, seeing the hurt she bravely tried to hide in her eyes. No word for her from Stuart.

"His head is full of his mission," Knight said. "He will come to you, free and eager, when it is done."

Leela searched his face.

"You are worried about him yourself, Lord Stirnye!"

"He is passing through a test of fire," Knight said slowly. "But he will be stronger for it."

Test of fire!

Knight might have gone to Europe himself, dropping his multitudinous executive duties, save that now was the time for Stuart to stand on his own feet. Now was the time for twenty-four years of invested fatherly training to prove its worth.

Fatherly training? It was more than that. No conscientious king, or wise patriarch, had trained his son more thoroughly for a life of leadership. A training that straddled two ages, and took account of a lost civilization.

Stuart must fight his own fight. Grimly, Knight stuck to that.

STUART drummed north, leaving Gibraltar.

He was somehow eager to visit Lar Tane and Elda, after another month. Passing over, he saw workmen busy in the ruins of old Vinna. Lar Tane's handiwork, of course. Rescuing his home-city from utter oblivion. But Stuart was a little startled as he looked down on the square before Chief Hal Doth's steepled house.

The large square was filled with youths stripped to the waist. In orderly rows, hundreds of them, they were swinging their arms, lunging, twisting their bodies in callisthenics. The commands came from a short, sturdy man on the balcony—Lar Tane.

But now the plane had been spied. The square cleared, yet the youths did not scatter as a crowd would have. In single file, with efficient discipline, they marched away.

Stuart's surprise was still on his face, when Lar Tane strode to meet him stepping from the plane.

Tane smiled briefly.

"I've been doing my part for the World-State. The youth are always the hope of any new order, *nicht wahr?* They are strong young men, the Tribers, but they need discipline. Organized, they can be useful. As, for instance, a policing system."

Stuart started.

"Policing system! How did you—"

"I thought of it from the first." Lar Tane's tone was caustic. "Without it, the World-State would fall apart the day it's born. I have the interests of the World-State at heart, Stuart."

Stuart was faintly uneasy. Regimentation! The thought sprang into his mind—another of his father's warnings. Molding and shaping of youth groups for unscrupulous ends.

"These youths—what do you tell them?"

Tane motioned toward his plane, wheeling around for take-off.

"Come along. I'm scheduled today to address the neighboring state, Bvera. I've been circulating from tribe to tribe hereabouts, speaking for the World-State."

The pilot of the plane startled Stuart. It was Elda. She sat coolly in the driver's seat, copper-gold hair peeping from beneath a helmet. Each time he saw her Stuart was more amazed. She had a spirit of daring stronger than most men's. Stuart hesitated. The great machine was not easy to handle.

Lar Tane smiled, pushing him forward.

"She has a steadier hand than most men. She has been practicing for a month."

Stuart's trepidation vanished, as the plane lifted smoothly into the air. He could not do better himself.

Her green eyes twinkled at his, as the plane settled to a steady pace.

"Brave of you to take a chance!" Mockery in her voice then changed to exuberance. "I love flying. These Nartican ships are almost as good as those of our time."

THE flight was short, to the landing square of a nearby tribal-state. A crowd gathered around the landed plane, and milled below the chief's balcony as they were led there. In a world without radio or printing-presses, oratory held first place. But the audience seemed hostile, on guard. The issue of the World-State had stirred fierce controversy everywhere, as Stuart knew too well.

Lar Tane smiled, bowed slightly to the chief, and faced the audience. He spoke with the ease of one who had often addressed huge assemblages in his time, perhaps through a radio and television network reaching millions.

"People of Earth! The World-State is the ideal form of government for humanity. I am from the past, from a dead civilization. My civilization earned oblivion because our people were divided. We must all work and sacrifice, and perish if need be, for the state. Nothing counts but the state!"

His voice had risen to a vibrant crescendo. Head lifted, face almost imperious, he was an inspiring speaker. Stuart sensed the subtle magnetism that flowed from him, infusing the crowd. Here was a man who, in a vital position, could do much good—or much harm. Stuart banished the last thought as quickly as it formed.

Lar Tane went on in the same vein. The World-State! A cause to fight for—die for! Stuart himself felt a wild enthusiasm that he'd never had before. And then suddenly—a wild horror. Fight for, die for! What did Lar Tane mean? What inflammatory principle lay like a crouched beast behind his eloquence?

The last thought was like a lightning blast. Stuart knew that Elda's eyes were on him, hawk-like. She touched her father's arm. Lar Tane started, as if from a trance. In lower tones, he concluded:

"Let us do everything possible toward our goal—the World Empire!"

THE audience burst out in ringing cheers. Lar Tane stalked from the balcony to the plane. The square cleared, as he waved. When they were in the air, he spoke.

"They've been won," he said decisively. "Tomorrow I'll go back and organize a youth group."

Stuart spoke tautly.

"Your speech was strong, Lar Tane. You talked of fighting and dying for the World-State. There is to be no fighting or dying—"

Lar Tane smiled patronizingly.

"Mere words. You must stir the people, make their blood sing. What's the harm of it?"

"My father wouldn't like it—"

Stuart wished he hadn't said it. Elda's eyes gave a sidelong glint of mockery. He could almost hear her thoughts—"Your father says. Your father says!"

Tane's voice was mild.

"How many tribal-states have you swung in the past month, Stuart?"

"Five." Five out of twenty-five he had visited.

"I've swung nine," Lar Tane said casually. "Nine who swear by the World-State. A solid bloc in central Europe."

Stuart flushed angrily.

"By what authority?" he snapped. "My father gave you no orders—"

"Nine of them," Tane repeated imperturbably. "For the World-State."

"But your methods—"

"*Ach!* Results are what count. Can you deny that?"

Suddenly anger and all dissolved, in Stuart. Yes, results counted.

"Lar Tane," he said eagerly, "between us we can swing Europe. You in the north, I in the south."

Strangely, Lar Tane hesitated.

"We could. But for what *kind* of World-State? Your father's kind? Its troubles would only begin, when it is formed. Riots, endless bickering, hamstrung progress. Is that the right way to put the pieces of civilization together?"

Stuart went a little cold. What lurked in Lar Tane's mind?

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

The man from the past eyed him narrowly, then shrugged.

"Nothing—for the present."

CHAPTER IX

Amazon

THE plane was just landing, at Vinna, with a swoop under Elda's hands that was sheer skill. She touched Stuart's arm, as he was about to follow Lar Tane out of the cabin.

"Do you want some real flying?" Challenge was in her green eyes.

"Go with her," urged Tane. "I'll await you at dinner."

He was already striding away.

For a fleeting moment, Stuart had a baffled feeling. A sensation of being a pawn, tossed between Lar Tane and his daughter. Then he laughed. Clear air and the heady heights of the sky would wipe his mind free of such fantastic thoughts.

"Let's go!" he said. "And make it good."

Elda did make it good. The plane taxied off with a roar. Stuart clung to his seat-arms as the floor pitched at a steep angle. She motioned for him to strap himself securely. Up and up the ship drilled at full rocket blast. At ten miles the stars came out in the thin air, defying the sun's radiance.

Elda's green eyes flashed.

"Look at the moon," she murmured. "I've often wanted to go to the moon."

Stuart was aghast. Was she mad? Was she thinking of blasting out into

space, where no ship had ever gone—and come back?

Her eyes were on him mockingly.

"Would you be afraid?"

"Yes." He ground out the word savagely. "And so would you."

"Perhaps." She shrugged daintily. Calmly she leveled off at fifteen miles, the plane's normal ceiling, and thundered forward. The velocimeter crept to 800 miles an hour. Within the sealed, warmed cabin, they felt little of the prodigious pace. Outside, the scant air shrieked like a thousand demons.

"Afraid?" she challenged again. "The Narticans tell me it isn't safe past 750. Rocket tubes explode at times."

Stuart's nerves crackled.

"Fool stunt, flirting with death. You need—taming!"

He spat out the last word.

"Taming?" Again challenge in her slumbrous green eyes. "Does the man exist—"

She was defiance, and flaming courage—and desire.

Stuart leaned toward her. She did not draw away. Her lips were an invitation. . . .

BUT he suddenly stiffened. His eyes went wide. Past her shoulder, through the cabin's side port of clear quartz, he had seen a brilliant flash from a dark valley, fifteen miles below. A flash of new metal, in a Stone Age world.

"Cut your speed and circle," he commanded, explaining briefly.

Fleetingly, he felt relief that the spell had been broken. He tried to read Elda's reaction, but failed. Without a word, she obediently circled and dived down from the stratosphere.

At a mile's height, they both saw the flash again. Across the valley it came, from where two lines of men stretched—locked in battle!

"Border war!" Stuart grunted. "And one side is using metal weapons. The edict of my father broken. I'll have to stop them."

Elda saw his hesitant glance at her.

"Stop them? Watch!"

The plane dipped down sickeningly. At a hundred feet Elda leveled out and raced into one end of the valley. Straight for the line of battle she sped, parallel with it. Then, nearing the first of the fighters, she daringly glided down still more, barely fifty feet off the ground.

Stuart's throat was dry, his tongue stuck. He had told her once of their method of stopping sporadic border wars. But it took almost a miraculous balance between underjets and driving rockets to keep from crashing into the ground—and into a wall of human flesh.

The plane skimmed over the heads of the battlers. The underjets threw blasts of furnace-heat at them. Behind the streaking ship, some of the horses stampeded. Men with scorched skins stumbled away. But the momentum of the battle carried on. In the fierce lust of fighting, the plane was disregarded.

Elda clucked her teeth.

Banking at the end of the valley, she repeated the maneuver, drenching the battle-ground with withering heat. Five more times the plane raced back and forth, like an angry hornet, till the savage lust of war below yielded. In disorderly retreat, both sides withdrew, leaving the slain and wounded. Over their shoulders they looked up at the stinging plane that had so effectively brought truce.

Elda was laughing, when it was done.

"Look at the rabble run! It's so

comical. In my time, war was *war!*"

"No laughing matter," Stuart muttered. "It shows a will to war. Land in the middle of the valley. I'll speak to the commanders, forbid them to go on."

A body of horsemen rode up from the side, presently, to the landed plane. The commander who dismounted and strode up was a dark, wiry man, descendant of 20th century Hungarians whose racial stock still clung to these rich plains along the Danube.

He bowed.

"Lord Stuart. I am war-chief Czocky, of Garia. I am glad you are here. This war is not of our making. The Huuns attacked a few days ago, violating our borders. We could only fight back. I sent three runners to Gibraltar, to report, but none got through. Your coming is a miracle. Tell Chief Goro of the Huuns to stop his attacks."

Stuart nodded.

CHIEF GORO rode up a moment later, at the head of a body of his horsemen. He was a giant of a man, with a red beard and ruddy skin, part of some Teutonic stock in that region. He and his men carried great iron swords, clumsy and crude, but giving them a decided advantage against their enemies' wooden clubs and spears and stone-headed maces. The Stone Age, utilizing the magic of metal.

Chief Goro dismounted and stood with straddled legs, point of his sword on the ground. Defiance radiated from him. Stuart drew himself up. Intimidation was fatal before a tribal chief.

"You are the aggressor in this border war, Chief Goro," he said sternly. "You have disobeyed Lord Stirnye's edict against border-war and metal weapons both. You may remain chief only if you swear to instantly stop your campaign."

Chief Goro spat.

"My campaign goes on!" he rumbled. "I do not fear Lord Stirnye. And I will have nothing to do with his World-State."

Stuart started. It was outright defiance, the first in twenty-five years. Other border-battles had started here and there, only to stop with one application of the blasting underjets of a plane or two.

"A fleet of ships will come, and patrol your state," Stuart threatened. "And you will be deposed as chief."

"They will get tired of patrolling. And they won't find me!"

Stuart argued no more.

"Lord Stirnye will hear of this and—"

Chief Goro roared out in harsh laughter suddenly.

"Will he?"

The atmosphere was instantly ugly. Stuart was suddenly aware that Chief Goro's men were closing in. Outnumbered, the Garian soldiers could only fall back. No weapon had been used as yet.

"Leave with your men, Czocky," Chief Goro bellowed. "I'll finish with you on the battle-field."

He turned to Stuart and Elda, now surrounded by his men.

"You will be my hostage, Lord Stuart. And the girl—"

His eyes were on her brazenly.

Stuart stood stunned. Chief Goro was a maniac, but a cunning one. No atrocity would be beneath him. Then Stuart gasped, in greater surprise.

Elda Tane had stepped forward. Her lissome body swayed and the full power of her eyes were on Chief Goro. Fascinated, he was watching her, caught in her spell. She smiled, as though attracted to this giant of a man who wanted her. She finally stood di-

rectly before him, as if about to throw herself into his arms.

Instead, her arm came out and she slapped the bearded chief stingingly.

"Beast!" she snapped. The smile had vanished from her face, replaced by livid fury.

One hand went to the chief's face, in amazed but not unpleased surprise.

"The woman has spirit," he chuckled. "I like that—"

WITH a quickness and strength that took him by surprise again, Elda snatched the sword-handle from his other hand. It was a heavy sword. Yet she swung it up deftly, placing the point against his chest.

"Move and you die!" Her voice was in deadly earnest.

Only a second had passed. The chief's men strained forward.

Elda tossed her coppery head warningly.

"Back! Or you will need a new chief."

Chief Goro himself signaled them back. Her blazing eyes spoke one word—death. He was pale now, trembling.

"Tell your men to go," Elda commanded.

For emphasis, she pressed against the sword, nicking into the hide covering his chest. He gave the order, with the fear of death in his voice.

When the troop had ridden a hundred yards off, Elda pulled back the sword. But only to raise it over the defenseless chief's head, ominously.

"Swine!" she hissed. "If you had dared touch me, my father, Lar Tane, would have burned down your villages, hunted down your people to the last child. He would have caught you and cut out your eyes and heart."

The sword quivered above the quaking chief's head. She was like a queen, imperious and cold, about to chop off the head of a disgraced subject. Stuart leaped to grab the sword away. But she lowered it of her own accord.

"Go with your life, Redbeard," she said contemptuously. "Go on with your little border-war, if you wish. Lord Stuart neglected to tell you something. My father, Lar Tane, is from the past, as is Lord Stirnye. He brought with him a mighty weapon. One that can burn whole villages. Do you understand? Now go!"

The cowed chief nodded soberly and loped off to his men.

INSIDE the ship, safe behind metal walls, Elda's green eyes glazed a trifle. For a moment she trembled in Stuart's arms, weak, frightened, feminine. Stuart was more amazed at this than anything. But only for a moment. Then she drew away, face composed.

"Well, that's that," she laughed.

"What if he had moved, before?" Stuart felt he had to know. "Would you have—"

"Killed him? Yes." She shrugged.

Stuart shuddered. Then he asked, "That weapon. Your father really has it?"

She studied him for a moment.

"Of course not. But I don't think Chief Redbeard will call that bluff either."

Stuart shook his head.

"You know, you shouldn't have used such brutal threat—"

There was sudden fury in her eyes. Fury directed at him.

"Don't you see how these people must be handled? Not gently—but with a heavy hand. It's the only thing they understand. They're Stone Age barbarians. They were ready to harm us. How can you handle a world of them except by threat—as your father does

"Tell your men to go!" Elda commanded. For emphasis she pressed against the sword, nicking into the hide covering his chest. He gave the order

subtly? And the feudal Narticans before him, for hundreds of years. World-State democracy! A pitiful dream in your father's mind!"

Stuart thought of defending his father. But sharply in his mind was the picture of Chief Goro, eyes inflamed, ready to kill—or worse. There were hundreds of Chief Goros, throughout Earth, and the people who produced them. Could they understand anything but the sword, any more than Goro?

Fury was replaced by mockery, in her voice.

"Your father says—"

Stuart flushed. She was prompting him, expecting him to say something trite. But there was another picture in his mind. Elda, like an outraged queen, sparing her subject's life. She had been wonderful, glorious.

"Elda!" His voice was low.

She was in his arms, then. Her lips burned against his. He was dimly aware of her murmur, a moment later.

"We'll rule Earth together, you and I."

He drew away, looking at her. Then he turned and piloted the ship himself. The pace of the plane was not more headlong than the new drive in his heart and mind. He realized that for better or worse something had changed within him.

Back in Vinna, Lar Tane laughed when he heard the story.

"Well done, Elda." He faced Stuart seriously. "In the light of an experience like that, is World-State democracy the answer? Chief Redbeard and all the other chiefs from Stone Age stupidity up will block the way. They must be lined up—by force!"

"No, not yet," Stuart groaned. "I want to think—think!"

"But think for yourself," Tane admonished. "Not as your father has thought for you, all your life. You are fit to rule, Stuart—rule a world empire. You and Elda. One that will grow great and strong and lasting."

He and Elda! Stuart thrilled to that, as his plane soared away. But not yet. He had made no decision. He must think carefully, he told himself, and continue plodding among the tribes.

He did, for another month, preaching democracy with words that seemed to have lost all meaning.

CHAPTER X

Voice from the Past

IN THE radio station at Gibraltar, Perry Knight and Aran Deen prepared to send voice signals across the Atlantic. Their staff of helpers were at the various dials. Electricity leaped and surged through coils and tubes.

Perry stepped before the microphone, as the prearranged time arrived. His eyes glistened in scientific zeal. Like the telephones in use, the instrument was crude, undeveloped, but serviceable. It would hurl his voice across what was yet a Stone Age world, and the wonder would not be less than if it were 5000 B.C. instead of 5000 A.D.

"Hello, America!" he began, enunciating clearly. "Hello, America! Can you hear me, Dad? If you can, call back immediately."

For a moment there was only the crackle of static from the receiving horn. Perry fidgeted.

Had his voice been lost somewhere, over the ocean, too weak to reach its goal? The dot-and-dash signals had been comparatively easy to achieve. Voice was another matter, taking more power, more delicacy of attunement.

Would there have to be weeks and months more of laboring, improving, experimentation? The simpler things of the 20th century had been resur-

rected only by heartbreaking toil. Was transatlantic radio — projection of actual voice—a little beyond their present powers?

Perry had gone through the same breathless suspense many times, awaiting the debut of a new-old invention. He remembered now how tricky the telegraph had been to produce, before they had joyfully tapped out the message—"What hath God wrought!"—for the second time in history.

Perry started violently as a voice sounded behind the static. It was a weird, howling voice, but understandable.

"Hello, Europe! Hello, Europe! I heard you clearly, Perry. Am I coming over?"

"Yes, Dad! And congratulations! What a great thing you've given the world again, with your 20th century knowledge!"

"How about your tantalum-grid tube?" came Knight's voice quickly. "It gave us the high-power range we needed. I didn't get that from my memory, or the crypt-records. I'm proud of you, Perry!"

At the side, old Aran Deen grinned, half indignantly.

"What about me? History will credit all three of us, in this revival of science."

"Thanks, Dad," Perry returned.

And then, because the moment was so unique, he went on with a rush of enthusiasm.

"Transatlantic speech, by radio! Instant linkage of thought across Earth's face. I'm going to build many more stations, everywhere. Human thought will be unified, in the new World-State. It didn't work that way in your time, dad, because radio came after scientific war. Now it comes before. There isn't a gun on Earth, and already we have the means of yelling friendly greetings from continent to continent. This age won't follow Greece and Rome and your time to self-inflicted oblivion!"

Aran Deen listened with something of wonder.

Almost, this keen-minded son of Stirnye knew more of past history than Stirnye or Aran Deen! Even as a boy he had buried his nose in all the preserved books of the crypt, and the libraries of Nartica. And he had plagued his father ceaselessly with questions about his 20th century. He had turned to science quite naturally, later. He was the first of a race of scientists springing forth from the Second Stone Age.

Aran Deen always thought in sweeps of history. And history was studded with little moments like this.

And moments like the one that followed.

PERRY turned away from the microphone, to look directly into the eyes of Elda Tane. He was startled. He hadn't heard her plane arrive, in the crackling of electrical apparatus.

She stood in the doorway, a vision of beauty. Beauty that would stir the hearts of most men. Light rippled from her copper-gold hair as though it were blown by a stealthy breeze. Her green eyes sparkled enigmatically.

"A pretty little speech," she said, gliding forward. Her red lips pouted a little. "You didn't visit us, so I've come to visit you. Is your science work so vital?"

"I believe it is," Perry said simply. He added, lamely, "I've always sent my respects with Stuart."

The girl laughed.

"Don't you ever relax? World-building must be tedious at times."

"Never. It's my life work. I believe in it."

She sobered suddenly, peering into his grey eyes.

"You really do, don't you?" Her tone became musing. "I wonder what you would have been in my world, where all science had reached a peak. Striven for higher peaks, I suppose."

Perry laughed this time.

"No. I would have been a revolutionist — against dictatorship. Your century was at a blind alley."

Elda stiffened, emerald eyes snapping as though at a personal affront.

"We had a World-State—"

"For five short years. It was tyranny. It cracked apart. Like Rome, it went under into a Dark Age. It was built on sand."

The girl bit her lip.

"You and Stuart are building on rock, of course!"

"The rock of democracy," Perry nodded, without self-consciousness.

"Rocks split at times—" At Perry's stare, she tossed her coppery locks, on which the light glinted metallically. "For a scientific mind, you're quite a philosopher. But still, behind it all, you must be human."

Perry suddenly lost his tongue, at the note of mockery in her voice. Human, yes, or he wouldn't be admiring her. She was ivory and gold, and intangible charm, woven into sheer perfection along with the twin emeralds of her eyes. More, behind the outer things were fire, courage, daring—and intelligence.

Perry started. Intelligence! Why had she come here? Hardly as a woman. She was deeper than that. Those questions—had she been testing him, sounding him out? But why?

Perry's analytical thoughts went that far before a drone sounded from the sky.

The plane landed, and Stuart strode in.

He glanced hesitantly at Elda, but without surprise. His direction had been north, from Lar Tane. She had preceded him. Then, with a bare word of greeting to Perry, he asked for radio contact with America.

Even the chance to use words instead of code failed to surprise him. After a greeting to the elder Knight in New York, Stuart spoke swiftly.

"We'll swing Europe, at the best, by a narrow margin. But suppose we don't, father? Suppose the World-State is voted down?"

The voice of Stirnye, Lord of Earth, came back calmly.

"Then we'll try again, when the time is riper. Nothing is lost."

"SOMETHING will be lost," Stuart returned, with a savage undertone. "My faith in humanity! The tides of ignorance and stubbornness I've fought against! Each little hide-bound state clamoring for more rights than the next. Even if the World-State is formed, the battle goes on."

"Of course!" Knight spared no punches. "A lifetime of work lies ahead of you, Stuart. I've warned you often, groomed you for it. From the tribal rule of the Stone Age to World-State democracy is a big jump. Bigger than history ever tried."

"But there is a simpler way at first." Stuart's voice became tense. "A logical extension of your rule, as Lord of Earth. Instead of Lord of Earth, a premier or chancellor, with a hand-picked cabinet. The best minds to guide and advise. And a parliament of delegates from the tribal-states."

Voice from the past, pouring poison into the ears of the future! Perry listened, stunned.

"Stuart!" snapped the voice from America. "Do you know what the name of that is —*dictatorship!*"

"Lar Tane calls it World Empire Socialism."

A groan came from Knight.

"What has he been telling you? Lar Tane is from an age that destroyed itself."

"Lar Tane—"

Stuart paused. Then his youthful but flint-hard voice went on.

"Lar Tane is a man I admire!"

A gasp came from the radio speaker, and then the bark of Knight's voice.

"Stuart, you're mad! I'm coming to Europe. I'll meet you in eight hours."

Stuart turned away from the microphone. He trembled a little. He was thinner, older looking. There was a brooding look about him, as of a mind that had suffered reversals of conception.

Perry grasped his shoulder.

"You can't mean you're throwing over all our plans, Stuart! The Magna Charta and all it means. Think of the future, not the present—"

"The future takes care of itself." It was Elda's voice. She stood beside Stuart, her green eyes narrowed. "Come with me, Stuart. We'll meet your father at Vinna."

"Stuart—"

But Perry's call was lost. Stuart strode away with her, face set. She glanced once over her shoulder—triumphantly. And Perry knew now why she had come. To wield her spell and make sure of Stuart.

Aran Deen was staring at the radio, shaking his head.

"True irony. The first achievement of radio voice, after an age, and the first words it transmits are those of trouble."

Perry nodded bleakly. What staggering twist of fate had come about?

Eight hours later a plane landed, and Knight stepped out. When he learned of Stuart returning to Vinna, he winced.

"Lar Tane is playing some game, with Stuart as a pawn," he said grimly. "I didn't realize his magnetic power."

"Or the power of green eyes," mumbled old Aran Deen. "Perry and I are going along, Stirnye. This is history!"

THEIR plane rocketed down a while later, over the ruins of ancient Vinna. And there, in the heart of it, reared a shining tower of new metal. Beside it, they recognized Stuart's grounded plane.

"Look!" Aran Deen pointed.

The top of the tower was encircled by an open balcony. They made out the figure standing there—Lar Tane. He looked up, with arms folded, as though awaiting their arrival. Then he vanished within.

"Strange, that tower in the center of the ruins," Aran Deen muttered. "Perhaps a ruling palace stood there in the 30th century!"

The subtle innuendo of it struck Knight's mind. A breath out of the past, dark and sinister, seemed to envelop the scene. Among the surrounding ruins, gangs of Triber workmen were clearing away debris. There was a regimented air about them. Overseers stood at strategic spots, seeing that the work progressed. They carried clubs.

Rage and dread both welled in Knight. What had been going on here, all this time? What did it mean?

The plane landed before the gleaming tower. As they stepped out, a dozen men in dull blue shirts marched forward. In their belts hung bright new swords of metal. Knight's face darkened.

One of the men saluted stiffly, his whole bearing a token of months of rigorous training and discipline. Breath of the past again—a police force with military training.

"Lord Stirnye. You and the others will follow us, to the presence of Lord Tane."

Lord Tane! It was that now.

The troop double-filed forward, with the visitors between. They were ushered down a curving hall, prim and unadorned, into a central chamber with a lofty arched ceiling.

Lar Tane sat in a raised chair at the head of a long table. Stuart stood at his right, Elda at his left. The escort left and the door closed. Knight sensed that they stood outside, on guard.

CHAPTER XI

Men Who Rule

LAR TANE was staring at them with a faint smile of greeting.

"My temporary home and headquarters, Stuart Knight," he said. "The metal from the Rhine plant. Built by Triber labor. But mere patchwork, really. I had it built here, where a palace used to stand, out of sheer sentiment. This table is a replica of a council table. Two thousand years ago, this was the center of rule, not New York."

Aran Deen was staring, wonderingly.

Knight conquered the violence that strove to burst from his throat. He spoke quietly.

"I appointed you administrator of the Rhine powerplant, Lar Tane. But with no other authority. From Stuart's reports, you applied regimentary methods at the plant, and extended them here."

"I've organized the Vinna tribe, and others, if that's what you mean," Lar Tane retorted easily. "Chief Hal Doth is convinced I've done good among his people. There is a more vigorous spirit."

"You've regimented the young men," accused Knight. "Trained them in military fashion."

"As a nucleus policing force for the World-State, *ja*."

"You've made metal weapons—swords. My edict against border warfare forbade that."

"They are a symbol, mainly. There must be *some* show of force to the people."

Knight realized this was a different Lar Tane from the one who had left him five months before. A Lar Tane who even in that short time had entrenched himself in the 50th century. But what, precisely, were his aims?

Knight continued the mental duel, drawing his adversary out. The atmosphere was charging with the electricity of tenseness.

"Stuart has seen much of you. You've made suggestions different from mine for the World-State."

"Valuable suggestions, I believe. We both agree, you and I, that there should be a World-State. The question is—what *kind?*"

"My kind," Knight asserted flatly. "The only enduring kind."

"Democracy! The experiment that failed." Lar Tane's tone was biting. His mask of suavity vanished suddenly. "It won't work, Knight. It's clumsy, slow, ponderous. It will stumble over its own feet."

"Yes, but it will never run blindly over a precipice."

Lar Tane snorted.

"Pretty words. There must be a central ruling body, subject to no dragging ties. A parliament of tribal delegates, for voicing opinion, but no more. The actual law-making invested in a cabinet of acknowledged leaders, and their executive chancellor. That is the kind of government that will lead this backward world to greater things."

"To chaos!" Knight snapped. "Doesn't the lesson of the past warn you at all? A dictator, with a puppet cabinet

and parliament of trained seals. At first progress, vigor, advancement. Then the dictator begins to play god. A brute heritage, older than man, crops out. Chaos, I tell you."

"You belie your own words. You've been a dictator—a beneficent one."

"The illusion of a dictator," Knight countered. "I built up no power-system. The past is buried. Force as a ruling method in human affairs must not be born again."

Aran Deen had been straining forward, like a hound on a scent.

"Chancellor—" he said reflectively. He looked at Lar Tane and Elda, recognition at last in his eyes. "It has come to me. Your names are historical, in ancient records. Lar Tane, Elda! But you were known as *Chancellor* Lar Tane. You were the head of the government that ruled the short-lived World Empire, from 2902 to 2907. You were, in effect, the Emperor of Earth for five years!"

LAR TANE had arisen, his short figure stiff. His head was lifted, imperiously. For a moment, his eyes faraway and reminiscent, he stood before them as a king might before his subjects. His thoughts seemed to survey an empire that had been his. An empire stretching from pole to pole.

Abruptly, he unbent. A slow, ironic smile came to his lips as he faced Knight.

"The ruler of a world that once was pays homage to the ruler of Earth today!"

He went on, after a pause.

"Revolutionists captured Vinna in 2907. Sacked the city, destroyed my work. *Shrecklich!* The rabble were after our lives, Elda and I. A year before I'd had the vault built secretly—in case. We exiled ourselves from our time."

He shrugged, and the bitterness of that past episode faded from his eyes. A burning fire leaped into them.

"I'm glad, now. My World Empire of the 30th century had no chance, with weapons a commonplace. But here in the 50th century—the world lies ready for empire."

Knight was staring, thunderstruck. Slowly he turned to his eldest son.

"Did you know of this, Stuart?"

Stuart nodded, and spoke for the first time.

"I was told this morning. It gave me my final decision." His voice was low but firm. "Lar Tane has plans that will launch an industrial program with a minimum of delay. With his 30th century experience, he can rebuild civilization rapidly, as First Chancellor. I will be his successor!"

Stuart paused, then flung up his head.

"One other thing. I'm sorry for Leela, but she must forget me."

He had stepped to Elda's side and taken her hand. She gazed up at him softly, her green eyes lustrous as emeralds. They were a striking couple—two young eagles ready to soar.

Knight's universe staggered.

And suddenly, it was like a lightning flash in the dark. The full cheapness of Lar Tane's plan lay exposed. Hopping from one age to the next, he was taking up where he had left off. His wolf's soul was bare now, lusting for power. He had weakened Stuart with his verbal poison, and ensnared him completely with Elda.

"Green eyes," Aran Deen hissed. "The green eyes of a witch! They have made fools of us all."

"Stuart!" Knight half groaned, taking a step toward his son. "You can't mean it, Stuart. Don't you see how you've been betrayed? You're lost—lost!"

Stuart shook a little. He took a step forward also, but Elda's hand gently pulled him back. He stiffened. His voice was adamant.

"You've never let me think for myself, father. I do now. I'm sorry."

Lar Tane spoke in cold triumph.

"You'd better capitulate, Stirnye, Lord of Earth. Without Stuart, your World-State falls."

Knight gripped himself.

"Capitulate—to treason? I'll have you arrested—"

Tane jerked a bell-cord. Instantly, the doors flung open and Chief Hal Doth marched in, at the head of a dozen blue-shirted men with swords.

"Tell Chief Hal Doth to arrest me," Lar Tane drawled.

Knight stared. The chief stared back, at first guiltily, then drawing himself up.

"Stirnye, you are no longer my lord!"

"Go on," prompted Tane. "Tell him why you accept me as your lord."

Chief Hal Doth wetted his lips and went on.

"Lar Tane is my lord. I am his vassal, for he ruled these same lands and waters 2000 years ago. And in a few months he has done more than you, Stirnye, did in twenty-five years. My people have cleaner villages, and metal hunting weapons. There is a more vigorous spirit. My young men are trained. Lord Tane will lead the way to great things quickly. *Heil!*"

Quickly, like mushrooms. Civilization overnight. Stone Age society in 20th century surroundings. Square peg in a round hole.

Knight's shoulders sagged. No use to argue. Chief Hal Doth was blinded in the light of Lar Tane.

Tane dismissed the chief.

KNIGHT drew himself up.

"I'm still Lord of Earth. I declare your activities outlaw. Your rebellion will be put down."

"By force?" mocked Lar Tane. "But that is a thing you renounced."

"It is necessary."

Lar Tane's face hardened. Suavity was gone.

"It's more than rebellion, Knight. I control all the chiefs of northern and middle Europe. And I have a hundred thousand young men trained, ready for my bidding."

"Then I declare you an enemy state!" Knight went on coldly. "I'm returning to New York. I give you twenty-four hours to renounce your opposition. Tell me of your decision by radio."

The eyes of Stuart Knight and Lar Tane locked. Two men who had ruled separate worlds, and now battled for a third.

Knight's glare dared the other to hold him. Tane shook his head.

"You're free to go, Knight," he said shrewdly. "I won't make you a martyr and bring the world about my ears."

Knight swept his eyes over the three of them, impersonally. For just a moment he met Stuart's eyes. They stared at one another across a gulf of misunderstanding.

Knight's voice was low, harsh.

"You know what this means, Lar Tane, if you go on—"

Knight said the appalling word, though it was like tearing his soul up by the roots.

"War!"

CHAPTER XII

Man of Two Ages

TWENTY-FOUR hours later, in the radio station at New York, the group huddled before the radio speaker waited silently, tensely.

Perry listened to the crackle of static,

and told himself he would some day eliminate it. Old Aran Deen nodded to himself, mumbling the word "history" at times. Leela sat pale and wooden, like any girl of any age struck by the blow of lost love.

Knight's blonde Nartican wife kept anxious eyes on him. He had returned from Europe in a state of near-collapse.

Knight was haggard. His heart pounded, measuring off time, his enemy.

It leaped, sickeningly, as a voice sounded through the howls of static.

"Lar Tane is here," announced the head of the staff at the Gibraltar station.

"Can you hear me clearly, Knight?" came Tane's rich-toned voice. "This apparatus seems crude."

"Yes, clearly." Knight drew a breath. "Well, Lar Tane. Have you thought better of it?"

Prosaic words. Yet hanging from every one were the hooks of destiny.

"Have *you?*" countered the voice from Europe. "I made my stand quite clear."

"That's your final word, Tane?"

"Final. This, to me, is Der Tag!"

Pulses thundering, Knight spoke the words.

"Then, as Lord of Earth, I hereby declare war on you, Lar Tane!"

The radio-speaker was silent for a long moment.

"No!" The word came like a pistol-shot, in Stuart's voice. "Father, you can't go that far in your stubbornness!"

Knight gripped a table for support. Within him, it seemed his heart would burst. Hurriedly, he made a last appeal.

"I must, Stuart. But you—leave Lar Tane! Come back to us—"

He was panting.

Again silence. Then:

"No, father. I didn't think it would come to this. But I believe in Lar Tane's world. I'm on his side, since there must be sides now."

"Or the side of a green-eyed witch," Aran Deen hissed.

Lar Tane's voice burst from the speaker.

"War! All right, Knight." His voice was deadly. "Attack me. I'm strong. And I'll be stronger. I'll sweep your armies back, conquer Europe, then the world. You can't stop me."

Knight made no answer. Drunkenly, he staggered from the radio, collapsed. When the Nartican doctor had injected, his eyes opened wearily. They all saw the shadow in them.

"NO, can't stop him," Knight whispered. "I'm going. There is no one left to lead." He groaned from the bottom of his soul. "No one left to lead."

"No one left?" Old Aran Deen's voice was shrill. "Stirnye, there is your son Perry."

"Perry? But he isn't a leader."

Aran Deen slowly shook his head.

"How blind you've been, Stirnye! Perry *is* the leader. Stuart never was. Leaders are born, not made. Look at Perry. Look at him, Stirnye. He is *you!*"

Knight looked, and was startled.

It was himself, of twenty-five years ago. The same rugged face, and level grey eyes that could dream or turn flint-hard. They reflected a mind both visionary and scientific. And something more. An indefinable quality lurked somewhere in him, a hidden strength that had not yet been put to test. But would now.

Knight's dying spirit rallied. He clutched his son's hand.

"Yes, I see it now. Listen to me, Perry. Gather an army. Smash Lar Tane flat, before he is too strong. If

you must, smash Stuart with him. What they represent must be stamped out ruthlessly. You're the hope of the future, Perry—of an age to come. Do you hear me, Perry?"

Perry nodded, silently.

Knight made a gesture.

"I proclaim you, Perry Knight, my second son—the Lord of Earth!"

His arm fell back, as though the effort had drained his ebbing strength. Once more his dry lips moved, almost soundlessly.

"Dearest—where are you—?"

His wife was holding his other hand. The dimming eyes saw her, and saw something else.

"Silva, you would have loved Central Park in the spring. . . ."

The voice trailed to nothingness. The features relaxed. He had known birth in the 20th century—and death there too.

Stuart Knight, man of two ages, had passed into all the ages.

PERRY arose, staring down at the body. He hardly heard the sobbing of his mother and Leela. He heard only the reverberating words—"I proclaim you Lord of Earth!"

An invisible burden leaped from the still form to his young shoulders. The mantle of leadership. And the baton of war.

For a moment Perry trembled, weak, afraid, appalled. He was a scientist, a student, not a leader and war-chief. He felt like running away, back to his quiet laboratory, where he had dreamed of a new world. But dreams were dreams, unless they were made to come true.

And abruptly, Perry straightened, squared his shoulders.

He stepped before the microphone, calling the Gibraltar station. Only a minute had passed. The heart-stroke had been deadly swift. Stuart answered.

"Father is dead," Perry said softly. "His heart."

"I—I thought so," Stuart's voice was hollowly quiet, but edged as though he controlled himself by will alone. "I heard a few words. Perry, do you believe I—killed him? Perry, I—"

Hysteria trembled in his tone.

"No. It was inevitable. But you robbed him of a peaceful death." Appeal crept into Perry's voice. "Let's stop all this madness. Come back, Stuart!"

Perry sensed that at that moment his brother was close to remorse for what he had done. Perhaps close to seeing the light.

"No." The word came back firmly, and Perry knew that the magic spell of Elda still held him.

Lar Tane's voice sounded.

"Yes, let's stop this madness. Your father meant well, but now he's dead. You can have a place in my government, Herr Perry. A high place!"

Perry smiled grimly.

"The Lord of Earth declared war on you, Lar Tane. I'm Lord of Earth now."

"I see." Tane's tone was a shrug. "It will be a game. What do you know of war? But we will have to leave now. Your staff of men here are muttering, eyeing my guard. I go back to Vinna, future capital of Earth!"

PERRY turned away from the radio, face drawn. Yes, what did he know of war? Again, an appalling fear and sense of helplessness struck him.

"Aran Deen, it's a mistake. I can't do it. I'm only 23—"

Panic-stricken words.

"Your father was only 23 when he went to Nartica, to end their oligarchy—by threat of war if necessary," grunted the old seer. "There was one

pitched battle, you remember. Several thousands killed. Stirnye won—won the world."

Stirnye, leader, war-lord, conqueror, at 23!

Perry's last moment of doubt vanished. Lord of Earth—*he* was that now. Faintly, he heard the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching feet, and the clarion bugles of war.

The spark had been lighted, to the seething fires of war. Where and when would it stop?

A WEEK later, the funeral of Stirnye was a grand and yet simple affair. The news had flown around Earth, by word of mouth, by the single telegraph line across Eurasia, and by plane. The death of Stirnye, and the war. Two such stupendous events had not happened for twenty-five years.

His body was laid to rest in the crypt north of New York. In the stone vault in which he had survived, a living fossil, for thirty centuries. One by one people filed past the bier, gazing at the face of the man who had changed history. Though stolid by tradition, many of the Tribers hung their heads in genuine sorrow. Women wept.

Most of the native population were there, in the valley on the Hudson, and many from outlying American tribes. A contingent of Narticans stood together, having flown from that distant land. A delegation from Europe had come, and one from eastern Asia, from Africa and South America, wherever powerplant sites had been cleared and Nartican planes were available.

Aran Deen delivered the funeral address.

"The whole world mourns. Stirnye, Lord of the Past, sojourned among us all too briefly. Champion of humanity, he struck free the chains of our Dark Age heritage. He dragged my homeland of Nartica from decadence. He taught the vast Triber world to think in terms of brotherhood. Like a harbinger of glory, he pointed the way to a new and higher civilization."

Aran Deen's voice changed.

"But his task is not done. He had only one lifetime. Today, a sinister cloud lies over Earth. In Europe another survivor from the past has arisen, like a Sphinx of evil. His doctrines are blind, selfish, ruthless. We need our champion, Stirnye, as never before. And he is with us, reborn! The body of Stirnye lies dead, but not his spirit. It lives again.

"Here is our new Stirnye, Lord of Earth, even though his name is Perry, not Stuart!"

Perry flinched, before the wild cheers of the crowd. As on the day of the Magna Charta, his tongue stuck. He had never addressed a crowd in his life. He was panic-stricken, horribly frightened. He was ready to run—for a moment.

Then, with the dead face of his father before him, courage oozed back. His voice rang over the clear air.

"People of Earth! My father preached a warless world. I will have the same goal. This is not a war against Lar Tane, but a crusade against the evil he brought with him. It must be crushed relentlessly. After that, I promise you peace and civilization."

That was all. The simple text struck home. The crowd's ovation showed their ready acceptance of the term crusade.

"Hail, Perry, new Lord of Earth!"

The cry arose spontaneously. Here and there a voice yelled "Stirnye" instead of "Perry." But the crowd did not take it up. That was something to be earned, that near-sacred name, bestowed on his father as a contraction of "Stuart Knight," and since come to

be almost a new title engraved in 50th century language.

One by one the various contingents strode up, in simple ceremony, pledging allegiance to Perry as their new First Lord. The European contingent showed its embarrassment.

"We cannot speak for all of Europe. But we speak for all the western and southern tribes. We offer our fealty to you, Lord Perry. We will do all we can to defeat our enemy, Lar Tane."

Perry felt an uplift of spirit. The whole world was back of him, except for the territory within the sphere of Lar Tane's personal magnetism. The war would be short, if terrific. Perry made a grim vow. He would smash at Lar Tane with all he had. Blitzkrieg—his father had told of that.

Perry did not think of Stuart. It was not pleasant to think of brother against brother.

PERRY had a war plan within a week, while the news was still penetrating, by the grapevine of gossip, to remote corners of Earth that war had been declared.

His problem was simply stated—to storm through central Europe. Capture Vinna, tribal-seat of Lar Tane's embryo empire.

But first, capture of the Rhine powerplant. It was Tane's only source of metal, for arming a growing legion. Gibraltar was in Perry's hands. All the European tribes below the Rhine and around to the end of the Mediterranean were loyal to him, as they had been to his father. They had helped make up, twenty-five years ago, a fleet that sailed for Nartica.

They helped make up an armada now. From fishing boats to large vessels that had sailed the seven seas in trade. They gathered in the harbor of what had been ancient Spain. Aboard, sailors and recruits tested bows and spears and stone-axes. Standard hunting weapons in the Second Stone Age, all Tribers knew their use from boyhood on.

Perry did not take time to train for maneuvers. The motley horde of a thousand ships straggled out in long lines, sailing for the mouth of the Rhine, like an armada of old Spain.

"We must strike, and strike fast," Perry told Aran Deen. "Before Lar Tane builds up his defenses. Time works for him and against us."

The old seer had insisted on being his aide, even in action, despite his years. He nodded.

"You have an analytical mind, Perry. But I'm afraid Lar Tane has, too."

A sign of it appeared. A plane droned over the armada the second day out. It circled, as though counting the ships. Finally it dipped over Perry's flagship, in the van. Daringly, it skimmed past the mainmast, almost touching a sail. There was nothing to fear from it, for bombs were unknown.

But Perry received a shock. He saw the flash of a coppery head through the pilot windshield. Elda Tane's head of hair! The undersurfaces of the wing were painted with an imperial emblem of the 30th century—the swastika.

Then the plane raced back toward Vinna. And when they came to the Dover Straits, a line of ships eased over the horizon, blocking the way. Hundreds of them, in a phalanx.

"I thought so," grunted Aran Deen. "The plane was a scout. Lar Tane is a move ahead. He conscripted those ships from the coast tribes of all the north. If we sail around the Brish Isles, his armada will meet us there. Well, Perry?"

Perry drew a breath of salt air.

"We attack!" he said.

The first battle signal of the war was

given. From crow's nest to crow's nest flew the signal, by waving of a banner. Ships tacked into the Straits, toward the line of waiting ships.

Perry's flagship was still in the lead. Straddling his legs against the roll of the deck, he bent his longbow. In his boyhood, he and Stuart had been deft in the hunt with that weapon. The arrow arced across the water and pierced the sail of the nearest ship.

The first shot of the war!

Perry was struck by the wonder of it. Yesterday a peaceful builder. Today, a warrior. Fate had made a tremendous switch in his life. It seemed unreal.

Suddenly, like a thunderclap, the real battle began. Perry's ships closed in and arrows flew with a whine. Above the whine sounded the hoarse shouts of men, with the spirit of battle awakened. And above the shouts began to sound the screams and groans of wounded and dying.

Perry was suddenly sick, appalled. He had hoped the defenders wouldn't actually fight. That this was all some monstrous joke. But obviously the magnetic power of Lar Tane had inspired them in his cause.

The war was on!

CHAPTER XIII

Marching Men

THE unreality faded. This was real, terribly real. Blood was spilling, men were dying. And for what? For a mad moment, Perry wanted to shout and scream for them to stop. For his ships to leave. Was anything worth this brutal orgy of death?

The dead face of his father appeared in his mind. The eyes opened and the lips moved.

"I had to do the same, my son. I had to drench my soul with blood though I had never before seen a human being killed. Bring peace through the paradox of war, or threat of war. You are fighting a real war. And you are fighting evil. It is a good fight."

An arrow went by his ear with a deadly *whing,* to bury itself in the throat of a man at the back. In a deadly rage, Perry notched an arrow and let fly at the enemy ship, no more than a hundred feet off. Again and again he shot. He saw a man fall, on that other ship, with his arrow in his chest.

This was war! At last he realized it.

From that moment on, Perry dropped entirely his hesitancy, vacillation. The old Perry of the quiet laboratory was gone, at least temporarily. He took up the role of warlord wholeheartedly. Yes, it was a good fight.

Aran Deen pulled him back from the exposed deck, where the archers sent out and received death.

"Fool," the old scholar muttered. "You're needed to direct and lead, not take an arrow in your vitals. Battles are won by strategy, not just brute force."

Perry grinned.

"You're right, old man. I have much to learn about warfare."

For an hour Perry watched, and thought. With a pair of binoculars—one of the first things his father had reinvented—he surveyed the far-flung sea battle. It was a disorganized melee. There had been no large-scale war, whether on sea or land, for centuries. Both sides were experimenting, learning.

Perry suddenly gave orders to be wagged from his crow's nest. His ships began to tack back and forth, across the phalanx of defenders, raking them with arrow-fire. His ships, a moving target, had the advantage.

But the enemy quickly took up the maneuver, weaving back and forth, destroying the strategy.

In quick succession, Perry thought of ramming, then grappling and boarding. His front line of ships, under orders, rammed a dozen of the enemy amidships, overturning them. His second line caught and grappled others, and boarding parties leaped across, in hand-to-hand battle.

But almost instantly, the enemy reciprocated. The battle area became a confusion of rammed, sinking ships, and ships lashed together with blood spilling over decks as spears and stone-axes were wielded. Trading ship for ship, man for man, Perry could not win. Lar Tane had gathered as many as he.

Suddenly a line of enemy ships leaped out, circled the battle area, and came at Perry's side, to drive his fleet to shore. Perry divined the strategy in time to send counter-attack. But some guiding intelligence had sent that attack. Was it Lar Tane himself?

THEN Perry caught the glint of coppery hair, on the deck of a large enemy ship back of their lines. Elda Tane! Perry steadied his glasses. No one beside her. Evidently Stuart and Lar Tane were back in Vinna. Did they think the war so unimportant that they left it in a woman's hands?

"You tremble, Perry," observed Aran Deen. When he was told, he cackled, "So, the green-eyed witch is commander? Do not underestimate her, woman though she is. The ancient records tell a strange story. Women had taken up the profession of war, in the 30th century, alongside men. Elda Tane was commander of her father's airfleets, in that dim past, winning for him his empire!"

"What?" gasped Perry. "I don't believe it. It's a fable. You can't trust some of those old records." He laughed wildly. "She thinks it's a game. I'll show her!"

Night fell, bringing armistice.

At dawn, Perry was tense. He had his front line of ships, the biggest and heaviest, ready for a daring leap ahead. A spearhead to plow and grind its way through the central part of the phalanx.

"I'll crack that line," he said grimly. He gave the orders. "Full speed ahead. Ram through. Don't stop for anything!"

The wind was favorable. Sails bellying, the spearhead sprang forward, in a great V. But even as they neared, Perry groaned. A waiting V from the enemy came from the side. The two spearheads met, with a crash and grind that resounded horribly over the still waters. Broken apart, Perry's V lost all its momentum. The enemy phalanx was unbroken.

Elda Tane had anticipated the move.

And following came a move of her own—a startling one.

Five planes droned down from the sky, wings labeled with the swastika. Lar Tane had obviously conscripted them—seized them—at the outbreak of the war, from the traffic that weaved between Nartica and the Rhine power-plant. Perry wondered what they could mean, heading down over his fleet. He soon found out.

Bundles of burning rags dropped from the planes, plopping with showers of sparks on ships' decks. Fierce flames sprang over several of the wooden vessels. Perry groaned as a dozen burned to the water's edge.

One plane swooped down over his ship. Perry cursed as he caught the glint of coppery hair again. During the night Elda had transferred from ship to plane, to lead this attack from

the sky. She flew so close that he could see the mocking smile on her face, as a flame-clothed bundle of rags caught in the sails. They burst into eager flame. Fire spread swiftly, whipped to a fury by a breeze.

Perry bitterly stepped in the lifeboat that took him to another ship. A few poor devils had been burned by fiery droppings from the sails. The planes roared away, for more of their incendiary cargo. Perry thought longingly of past-age machine-guns and anti-aircraft, to hammer the insolent, low-flying planes from the sky. There were no guns in the 50th century. It was a queer war.

When he stepped on the deck of another ship, he sent orders around to keep all decks swabbed with water. No more ships would burn. But the air-raid had done incalculable harm—to morale.

As though fully aware of it, the enemy leaped to attack.

The phalanx swept forward, among his disorganized formation. Perry's men could not fight and swab decks both. When the planes reappeared, within an hour, burning rags dropped and again ships burned.

The final blow came, unawares, through the pall of smoke that swirled over the waters. A fleet of ships appeared around the headland of the British Isle. Attack from the rear! Elda Tane had sent them around.

Perry's fleet, crushed in the middle, driven inshore among shoals, threatened to become completely haphazard prey.

"Perry, there is only one thing to do—" Aran Deen was shaking his head sadly.

"I know—"

Perry called retreat.

Ingloriously, what was left of his grand armada fled from the Dover Straits for open water. Perry swallowed the bitter pill of defeat. He had lost 200 ships.

The first engagement of the war was history.

"I TOLD you, Perry," piped Aran Deen, on the way back to harbor. "She is a green-eyed Amazon."

Perry rebelled at the thought. A woman as beautiful as she, hurling the thunderbolts of war. Amazon—and Delilah. Perry pitied his brother, caught in the web of that dual nature.

Perry shook himself. He must not underestimate her any longer. There was intelligence behind her beauty—incredible daring. She must know many tricks of war, from her warlike time.

"What's next, Perry?" Aran Deen asked. "Capture of the Rhine plant by sea is out of the question. She can hold us off at the Straits indefinitely."

But Perry was suddenly sick. Excitement over, he remembered now the men falling with arrows in their hearts, men drowning, men burning, men crushed as masts fell. The reek of blood, the horrible cries, the rustle of the wings of Death. His soul shrieked against the brutal episode, his first baptism of blood.

And how many more would follow? How long would the Frankenstein monster of war stalk the world?

A plane drummed down from the clouds, circling over the limping armada. It singled out the flagship ensign and darted low. Coppery flash again! Another bomb of fire? Perry eased as only a stone bounced to the deck, wrapped in white rag-paper. The plane droned away.

Perry read the note, in a bold, angular script.

"To Perry, Lord of Earth, pro-tem: I hate a dull world. Try again. But I warn you, you won't succeed. My father's offer is still open."

It was signed: "Elda, Commander of World Empire Military."

Perry knew then, how long the war would last. Till she, and the power behind her, had been annihilated.

"I'll gather an army," he told Aran Deen grimly. "I'll attack by land. This world isn't her playground."

PERRY sat at the telegraph key, at Gibraltar, a day later.

"Attention, all tribal-states!" he tapped out. "Send your able-bodied men to the Pree region. Mobilization orders from Perry Knight, Lord of Earth."

Near the ruins of what had been gay Paris in another day, Perry gathered his army. They flocked in from all the southern tribes, through which his telegraph crackled the call to arms. Messenger horsemen penetrated to outlying tribal-states. From them all came the pick of their huntsmen, strong and sturdy men, skilled with weapons.

The excitement of M-day lay in the air.

Perry was a little amazed at the readiness with which the Tribers came to join the army. Hardly antipathy toward Lar Tane, who had done them no actual harm. Hardly because Perry was Lord of Earth; for they could easily have hung back.

Perry was dismayed. Was it sheer love of fighting, war?

But then he knew the true answer. These were the adventurous, restless and reckless strata of any society. The kind who, in civilization, would make good pilots, racers, and football players. His father had often said that in his 20th century, America had let off steam in competitive sports and activities, where the nations of Europe had had boys and men marching and training for battle.

Perry armed them with metal swords. At his order, the Gibraltar plant had turned these out. Perry hated to give the order. It countermanded his father's edict of twenty-five years—no metal weapons.

Instead of rails for a future railroad, and metal girders for radio towers, the presses stamped out weapons of war. Instead of the things that built, the things that destroyed. A bit of 20th century industry arming the Stone Age with new and murderous tools of battle. Grinding irony.

But Perry had to. Lar Tane had metal weapons. His Rhine plant was probably whining day and night, fashioning metal into the instruments of death.

IN SIX weeks, Perry's army was on the march.

Hurry! Hurry!

The refrain beat in his mind. Lar Tane had no more than a toehold. Only a hundred tribes in central and northern Europe, who had succumbed to his spell of voice and personal magnetism, offering him their men and will to begin building an empire. Smash him, crush him, before he crept out like an octopus, to trample all the world under his military heel.

A hundred thousand men followed Perry, from a hundred different tribes. They fraternized, in the comradeship of war. Apart, by tribal traditions, they might have fought over respective tribal borders. Together, the spirit of the crusade filled them, as it had filled the diversity of crusaders in the Middle Ages.

Their war-cry, suggested by the canny Aran Deen, was—

"Down with Lar Tane, tyrant of the past!"

But mostly, Perry realized they were spirited men ready for a fight. At

night, around campfires, they practiced delightedly with the new swords. The clang of metal violated the vast hush of the Stone Age world.

Wagon trains of supplies rumbled behind the army. Fresh food supplies came from tribal-states they passed through, grumbling. But victimized tribal chiefs knew hungry men would be worse than men fed. Perry promised them pay, eventually, in goods from Nartica.

Hurry! Hurry!

Trivial details did not matter. While on the march he organized a skeleton staff of officers, parceling out authority. He was amazed at his own forethought, whipping the disjointed horde into the semblance of an organized fighting force.

"You have an analytical mind," Aran Deen explained it. "Scientists are soldiers without a cause. Soldiers are scientists without patience."

Perry led the way north to the Rhine powerplant. He had tried by sea. He would try by land. After that, a direct campaign to Vinna.

The first sign of the enemy appeared. Again a plane scouted over them, as over the armada, counting them. Perry cursed, having hoped to make it a total surprise. One of his own scouting planes reported at the next village. There was no sign of an enemy force protecting the Rhine plant!

"The way is open!" cried Perry, driving his army faster.

"I wonder," returned Aran Deen dubiously. "The green-eyed witch has some plan up her sleeve."

They drew close. Perry noticed one day a line of broken concrete pillars, hoary with age. Beyond, dotting the landscape, here and there, were broken piles of concrete that had once domed underground shelters.

"The old-time Maginot line," muttered Aran Deen. "Tank-traps, pillboxes, rows of forts. Further on, the great underground line itself. Relic of a folly of your father's time. He found parts of the chambers still intact. Perry—"

But Perry had let out a shout.

"Look—the Rhine plant!"

It jutted over the skyline.

"We're that close—"

CHAPTER XIV

Maginot Line

THE whine of arrows sounded, suddenly.

Men fell, in first columns of Perry's army. Instantly the men were alert for battle. But there was nothing to shoot at. Only cracked domes.

"They're in those!" screeched Aran Deen. "Elda is using the old Maginot Line!"

And so it proved. Perry called for battle array, and the army lumbered forward. Arrows rained from concealed vantages ahead, taking a steady toll. When they reached the first line of concrete, figures scurried back—to the next line. Again a shower of arrows. Again the stealthy enemy retreated to the next line of emplacements.

Perry was appalled, as his men's ranks were eaten into by the well-protected enemy. How deep were these ancient lines?

"Miles and miles of this!" asserted Aran Deen.

There were ten miles of it. Perry crunched through, with the Rhine plant uppermost in his mind, trying not to see how many of his men fell. Then suddenly before them were the formidable ramparts of the main line. From it came such a blast of arrows that Perry was forced to call retreat.

They were not allowed to stand.

Snipers drove them back mercilessly, till they had retreated the full ten miles again. There had been no chance to come to grips with the enemy, with swords. It had been Indian fighting, ambush, ideal from behind the widespread pill-boxes and emplacements of a forgotten war-age.

"We'll try another point," Perry decided.

Overhead droned two of the enemy planes, following and observing. When they next drove in, the same showers of arrows greeted them with singing death. Enraged, Perry led his army almost to the coast. The ubiquitous enemy was there, behind concrete domes and ruins, skipping back from line to line. Perry had already lost hundreds of men, the enemy hardly any.

"No use, Perry," Aran Deen muttered. "The lines start at the coast and follow the river, between us and the Rhine plant. I've seen the 28th century plans. We might storm through at one point, but only a remnant of our men would be left. These would be slaughtered by Elda's fresh, full troops."

Perry had to try once more. The Rhine plant, no more than twelve miles distant, shouldered against the horizon enticingly. Once he took it, half the war was won.

But could he take it?

Perry let his men rest three days. With his officers he planned an organized assault. His first line of archers spread in a long line, advancing slowly from clump to bush, with a minimum loss of men. The enemy retreated stubbornly. Within a mile of the main line of domes, the archers crept within arrow-shot and waited.

So far so good. Perry caught his breath and called for the charge.

Back of the archers came the spearmen, in two separate tides, attacking at two points. When the defenders massed at those two points, with fusillades of arrows, Perry's archers raked them with feathery death. The odds were somewhat evened.

And now was the time!

Perry gave the signal. With a thunder of hooves, his cavalry, unused till now, surged between his charging footmen, straight for the gap in the enemy line of defense. The domes were not a continuous structure. If once his cavalry horde stormed through, the enemy would be split in half.

Perry held his breath, as his cavalry swirled forward. They were close now —almost through. The enemy had had no chance to close in, to stopper the gap.

And then, magically, the enemy arose, in that apparent gap.

Like warriors sown by Jason's teeth, they sprouted from the ground. Or so it seemed. They came from underground. Two thousand and more years before, in grander wars, waiting fresh troops had thus sprang up from their bomb-proof shelters, to hurl back troops already worn out by fighting. It was the whole underlying purpose of the ancient Maginot Line.

Perry's cavalry ran into a snowstorm of arrows and spears. Men toppled like tenpins. Riderless horses wheeled, screaming and snorting, breaking the charge.

Perry screamed, too, in sheer agony of defeat.

HIS eyes caught a hated flash of copper. Elda stood there, back of her men, fearlessly. Her tall, graceful figure was limned against the distant bulk of the Rhine powerplant, like a symbol against its capture. She had a longbow in her hands and was sending out arrow after arrow herself.

She seemed to be laughing, exulting, enjoying this game of war, playing with men and lives as if they were pawns.

"The green-eyed witch," guessed Aran Deen, watching Perry's face. "She is there, exposed! If only a kind arrow would seek her out. But she would likely survive the kiss of Death himself, with her hellish charms."

Raging, Perry dropped his binoculars and snapped up his longbow. He pulled back of his ear, muscles cracking. The arrow arced up and up, high over the battleground. It struck her shoulder. Spent, it did no harm. It had been a childish gesture.

She had seen the high-flying arrow. Binoculars to her eyes, she seemed to spy Perry on top the concrete dome from which he watched the battle. Her white arms flashed and back from her came an arrow, thudding into the ground ten feet before Perry's feet.

"She is not a woman," gasped Aran Deen. "Few men could send an arrow that distance. But Perry, this is slaughter—"

PERRY started, looking back over the battle.

The enemy was now a solid line, bristling with arrow-fire that thinned his ranks of wavering footmen. The cavalry was huddled in a mass, ready to bolt.

Perry accepted defeat. Retreat was called. Ten miles back, safe from pill-box snipers, camp was pitched. Night fell, and to Perry it was like a night of future despair.

The second major campaign of the war was over. Perry had lost 4,000 men. Lar Tane had won again. Lar Tane? Elda! Perry began to think of it as almost a personal war between himself and the emerald-eyed Amazon from a past age.

"But she didn't defeat me!" Perry stormed, pacing up and down beside a camp-fire in a frenzy of concern and impatience. "It was the Maginot Line. Without that, I'd have crushed her, in open battle. I had no chance to come to grips with her!"

Aran Deen nodded.

"She reached into the past to defeat you. After your father's time, alternately, two traditional powers tried for decades to smash that line, failing. The Rhine plant is impregnable behind it."

Perry bit his lip.

"Yes," he admitted bitterly, "I see that now. All right, that's that. The first part of my war plan is canceled. The second becomes necessary—striking for Vinna itself. Taking over Lar Tane's self-styled ruling center. A knife in his empire's heart. Tomorrow we'll march east—toward Vinna. In open battle, it's just a matter of grinding through—"

Aran Deen broke in.

"Have you forgotten how far the ancient Maginot Line runs?" he asked quietly.

Perry started.

"How far?"

"All the way from here along the Rhine to the mountains of Swizlan, for 600 miles. We're completely blocked off from the west!"

Perry pondered that, appalled. Hurry! Hurry! The drive of time still beat in his brain. Where could he crunch through? How? By what strategy?

By dawn he had devised a plan, before the dying embers of the fire. He called his council of officers.

"Twenty thousand men will remain here, keeping the enemy occupied," he told them. "The rest will march, as secretly as possible, to where the Rhine bends deep into enemy territory. There we'll strike. We'll march at night, through woods. Surprise attack. The enemy can't be in force all along the Maginot Line, for hundreds of miles."

TEN days later, Perry's main army of seventy thousand reached the

bend of the Rhine. Once through the Line, there would be open plains for a drive on Vinna.

At dawn, sure that he had stolen a march on Elda, Perry turned into the Line.

Like a clap of thunder, there was battle.

Arrows whistled from pill-boxes and the ramparts of saw-toothed tank-trap ruins. Perry smiled uncertainly. A few thousand men, perhaps, a sort of sentry line at this strategic bend of the Rhine. The main enemy army must still be at the mouth of the river, engaging his decoy troops.

But the resistance increased. Perry's grin became an empty grimace.

Desperately, he plowed five miles into the hail of arrows before he realized a full army faced him. Stunned, he retreated. Fully manned, the Line could not be stormed, from bitter experience.

"In the name of Heaven, how could she do it?" Perry groaned. "How could Elda know I'd strike here? None of her planes spotted our night marches."

"Spies, of course," Aran Deen shrugged. "Simple for her to slip some of her men into our ranks. We have no regulation uniform, no roll-call, no way of checking spy from soldier. Her army marched with ours, like a shadow across the river. Ah, Perry, the green-eyed witch is no fool!"

Perry knew that he was temporarily berserk, in the following days.

Under forced march, he led his army south, and rammed against the Line three more times. Elda and her army were always there. If he marched by day, her scouting planes easily followed, circling like mechanical eyes. If he marched by night, spies leaked across the river. There was no way of checking spies. A strict sentry system meant nothing, when the sentry himself might be a spy. To institute roll-call would take weeks—months!

No time for that. Three more men-draining, futile thrusts against the adamant Line, and Perry gave up. It was like trying to crack a nut with a rubber nutcracker. Mightier armies of the past had been hurled back. It was like a spring-cushion—the farther the advance, the more devastating the back-push.

PERRY came out of a daze to realize the war had assumed proportions beyond first expectations. It was not just a matter of gathering an army and smashing forward. Geography had thrust its leering face into the picture.

"I see it all now," he murmured, poring over a map of Europe. A plane had brought the Atlas, from America. Printed in the 20th century, it was still the most reliable mapping of the world of the 50th century.

Perry handled the brittle yellow pages with a sensation of awe. On page 60, Perry blocked in the Maginot Line, shaded in the Swiss Alps, and drew a line around to the head of the Adriatic Sea. It would be his line of march.

"Lar Tane is impregnable at the west," Perry summed it up. "The north is out of the question, by sea. But he is open at the east and south—"

"Not at the east," denied Aran Deen. "This 20th century map does not show it, but another 'Maginot Line' runs from the—what is it called?—Baltic Sea to the Danube."

"Yes, I remember," Perry nodded gloomily. "The great Russo-German struggle of the next century."

He blocked in a line down across the plains of long-ago Poland, to the Danube at Budapest. Then a sharp turn, and a line to the Adriatic Sea. For in the 22nd century, the Slav-Balkan Federation had dug in against invasion from the north.

"What a mad world it was," reflected Aran Deen. "Your father saw the beginning of scientific war, Lar Tane the end of it. For a thousand years, the European wolves ran each other down. And America too. Then the lights of civilization blinked out altogether. Now, at the dawn after the Dark Age, Lar Tane is once more fighting the old war!"

Perry shrugged that away.

His eyes stared at the blocked-in map.

"Lar Tane has us cut off from the Rhine to the Adriatic, and then up to the Baltic. But one spot is open. The south, between the Tyrolean Alps and the Adriatic—"

He clutched the old man's arm suddenly.

"Or was a line built there too!"

Aran Deen grinned toothlessly, at the younger man's sharp dread.

"No, not there—luckily."

Perry straightened.

"Then we attack there, for a drive on Vinna."

A plane droned down from the clouds, soon after. Again a stone bounced down at Perry's feet, wrapped in paper. He knew it was from Elda, for again he saw the coppery flash of her hair.

"To Perry, Lord of Earth, pro-tem. You have made it interesting. If I must tell you, your only chance is from the south. Your *last* chance! Make it good. Elda."

PERRY crumpled the paper in his hand, knuckles white.

"I'll make it good!" he hissed. "I'll take the mockery out of her green eyes. We'll see if she's so high and mighty when my army marches into Vinna. We'll find out if she can smile when she's a prisoner of war!"

"You hate her, don't you, Perry?" Aran Deen cackled.

"Of course I hate her," Perry snapped. "What makes you think I don't?"

"She will have to be sentenced to death, along with Lar Tane. Remember that!"

Perry started. He hadn't thought that far.

"And Stuart?" he whispered. A world divided, brother against brother. That thought struck again, like a sledge-blow.

Aran Deen shook his head.

"I cannot say. But the green-eyed witch must go. Remember that."

Perry nodded grimly. If he had hesitated at all in the thought, he told himself, it was only because she was a woman. War was terrible. But the aftermath of war was worse. Those grim, necessary purges. Perry knew he aged, in that moment.

After the tragedy of war—what? An age-old problem.

Chapter XV

Swords Aloft

AN ARMY of 200,000 marched where millions had marched in a bygone era.

Perry knew it was a small army, in 20th century terms, and poorly equipped. Only half had metal weapons. But it was unlikely that Lar Tane had been able to conscript more, or produce more weapons. The battle would not be less significant than a thunderous, shell-torn battle of ancient days. More significant. The whole world was at stake.

Perry had conscripted the larger army hastily, by messenger and telegraph. He must hurtle through to Vinna, at any cost. Delay meant a chance for Lar Tane to organize, build, fortify. To add fuel to the seething fire under a continent.

When the snow-capped Tyrols loomed to the west, and the flat plains of the Danubian region stretched to the north, Perry expected the enemy. Elda could choose her battlefield wherever she liked. It was all the same here. No rows of concrete dugouts to sneak behind.

At last arrow-fire announced the enemy, from the opposite slope of a wide valley.

Perry called a halt on the near side, and went up in a plane for observation. Drumming over the slope and the brushland beyond, Perry looked down and made out the enemy clusters of men. By rough estimate, about 150,000. Despite his personal magnetism, Lar Tane had evidently had some trouble raising an army. He had had only six months, in the 50th century. For twenty-five years before, the world had acknowledged Stirnye the Lord of Earth. It was remarkable that Lar Tane had whipped up that much of a following.

And what war-aim could Lar Tane hold up, palatable to the Tribers? What war cry?

Not "defense" of their homes and lands. For Perry had been shrewd enough, at the start, to announce he was fighting a crusade against Lar Tane alone. No reprisals against the rebellious tribal-states. The Stone Age grapevine of rumor must already have circulated that undermining whisper.

Perry was sure his men had more morale, more reason and spirit to fight. That was important, in any war of any age.

Perry's eyes gleamed. Not far to the north, from his plane's vantage, he caught the glint of blue water. The Danube. On its shores, the smudge that marked the ruins of olden Vienna. He'd smash this army, march there, drive Lar Tane to hiding. It would be over soon.

Perry almost catapulted out of his seat, suddenly, as his pilot slewed sharply.

Perry heard the crescendo and then fading of thundering rockets. He caught the metallic glint of the enemy plane that had nearly rammed them, sweeping by. And the glint of copper-gold hair!

The other plane circled, came roaring back, straight for them. Perry's pilot was already turning tail. With an explosive curse, Perry grabbed the dual controls and took over with a jerk of his head to the pilot.

Chasing him away, was she?

Probably with that mocking smile on her face. Perry swung his ship around, straight for the other. He gunned the drive rockets to whistling speed. In seconds the two ships would smash head-on.

THE pilot clawed at Perry's arm, with a shriek of fear. Perry shook him off with a wild laugh. Chase him away, would she? She'd have to chase him through hell to do it.

He could see her face now, straight before him through the other ship's windshield. Ivory oval face, coppery helmet of hair, emerald eyes. The features ballooned in his vision.

Mocking smile—no, there was no mocking smile. A horrified look had leaped into it. No wonder. She was looking into the face of a maniac—Perry's face. And at Death's grinning skull over his shoulder.

Perry waited for the crash that would snuff out his life, and the life of the green-eyed girl who had made him a maniac.

There was no crash.

At the last split-second, the other plane slewed sharply upward. What slim margin they missed by, Perry

never knew. Perhaps a foot.

Perry eased his throttle and looked around. The other plane wobbled erratically, as though out of control. It righted finally, swooped, and made a very bad landing in an open field. Perry soared down, as a slim figure stepped out and leaned against the cabin.

Perry wanted to see her expression, but couldn't. Tears blinded him. He left. He was still laughing wildly, maniacally, when he landed beyond his army, and dragged out the pilot, who had fainted. But he stopped laughing suddenly, and was sick.

"I saw it," cried Aran Deen, hobbling up, waving his thin arms. "Young fool, suppose you'd been killed?"

Perry shrugged, feeling better.

"I called her bluff, that's all. Now I'll smash her army. We attack at dawn."

THE snow-capped Tyrols looked down on the sprawling battle that was fought for three days in the wide plains beyond the foothills. The weather, as though not to interfere, was balmy. The age-lasting mountains had seen countless other battles, through history, some that rocked their foundations. But none so strange, so vital, though not a single gun cracked through the Stone Age air.

Stone Age battle it was. Medieval butchery, men against men. Charges of cavalry against cavalry, footmen against footmen. Arrows, spears and stone-axes against the same.

But a new element had been introduced, from the previous battles along the Maginot Line.

Swords.

In hand-to-hand battle, spears and arrows exhausted, swords came into play. Perry exulted, at first. At last he had actually come to grips with the enemy forces. No longer were his men falling like leaves, charging against a concealed enemy in pill-boxes and underground warrens.

But his men were still falling, more rapidly than he liked.

Through the first day, he saw why. Lar Tane had trained fifty thousand of his men in the art of sword-play. They wore blue shirts, as distinguishing insignia. They had been divided into units of cavalry who had curved sabers, attack troops who had long double-edged swords, and shock troops with murderous short swords, to stem any attack quickly.

Perry's swordsmen had only one kind —straight long swords.

Time and again, his attacks were stopped, by the shock troops with their light slashing weapons. Then would come counter-attack, at the center, long swords in the hands of fresh men. Finally cavalry charges at his right and left wings, with their wicked sabers cutting down his footmen methodically.

Perry watched with pursed lips.

"Our numerical advantage is fast disappearing," Aran Deen mumbled that first day. "Lar Tane developed a trained fighting force. Perry, it is slowly going against us."

"We'll smash through tomorrow," Perry said grimly. "We must!"

He didn't sleep that night. He directed the wagon trains that took the dead and wounded away, and brought food supplies from the rear. At times he shuddered, sick at the blood spilled. Blitzkrieg, as his father had admonished. A sheer, brutal hammering against Lar Tane, at any cost. Quick victory.

And if he failed?

Perry was aghast at the thought. If he were thrown back, Lar Tane would have a breathing spell, gain in strength. Already he had organized a formidable trained corps. Given more time, his

military power would rise astronomically.

AT DAWN, Perry called the charge with set lips.

"Down with Lar Tane, tyrant of the past!" yelled the troops, marching forward. Their morale was still intact, but a few more days of slow decimation and it might crack.

Perry threw all he had into the second day's attack, recklessly saving a bare minimum for relief, reinforcement, and emergency.

Perry noticed with what efficiency the enemy repulsed the attack. Unit by unit they marched to the front line. Unit by unit they fell back for relief. It was admirable, sheerly artistic. And maddening.

Perry stood at the crest of his side of the valley. He saw her finally at the crest of the other side. Even in the glasses she was a small figure, but her coppery flame of hair flashed like a mirror in the bright sun.

Between them they surveyed the lower valley, and its wide-strung battlefield. Horsemen carries messages back and forth down the slopes to their respective field generals.

Perry and Elda were the guiding forces. It reduced to that, as though it were a complicated chess-game they played, with human lives as pawns, the world as a prize. He was pitted against a woman. But more than a woman. An Amazon, and a 30th century mind that had seen much more of war than he.

Perry realized the odds against him. She was probably standing there with her mocking smile, scorning his clumsy frontal attack. Perry looked down. Step by step his attack had been broken. His army's advance ground to a standstill. The struggle settled down to hours of slow, grim butchery again.

And Perry lost more men than she, with her clever swordsmen.

Night brought temporary armistice, but no peace to Perry, again sleepless.

"Tomorrow," said Aran Deen, shaking his silvery head, "tomorrow may tell the story."

"Tomorrow we attack in one mass," Perry decided. "Every man."

AT DAWN, Perry watched from his vantage. Elda was in her place, a glint of copper across the valley. This day would tell the tale.

Perry's swordsmen advanced toward Elda's swordsmen, two grim lines of men. The secondary lines of archers cast solid sheets of arrows back and forth. Cavalry troops thundered toward cavalry troops, ready for the shock of meeting.

All hell would break loose in a minute, under the morning sun.

It broke loose sooner than expected.

Down from the north drummed twelve rocket planes, probably the total number Lar Tane had been able to confiscate. They swooped down over Perry's forces, vulturously. Back and forth they raced, raking his men with heat-blasts from their underjets.

Perry stared, thunderstruck.

His advancing men wavered. The threat from the sky took them completely by surprise, spreading the germ of demoralization. When the enemy forces struck, Perry's men fell back. Like a resistless tide, the enemy pushed forward. Their triumphant yells carried through the clashing of metal swords.

Morale shattered, Perry's army was beaten back, slowly and then with rising speed. The tide of battle had taken a definite turn.

Perry's soul writhed. Defeat! It was plainly before him. Elda had planned this with diabolic cunning.

A rocket plane zoomed down on Perry's forces

Aran Deen was shaking his head.

"Call retreat, before it becomes a rout, Perry!"

"No!" Perry bellowed the word. "I'm going down there myself!"

The old seer's bony hand clutched his arm.

"Don't be a fool. You can take a defeat now, without harm."

"I'll win now!" Perry cried.

He pulled an aide off his horse, leaped astride, and thundered wildly down the slope.

Aran Deen looked for the coppery flash of hair across the valley.

"The green-eyed witch makes fools of us all!" he muttered. Then he started.

The coppery flash wasn't there. Had Elda, too, joined the battle?

CHAPTER XVI

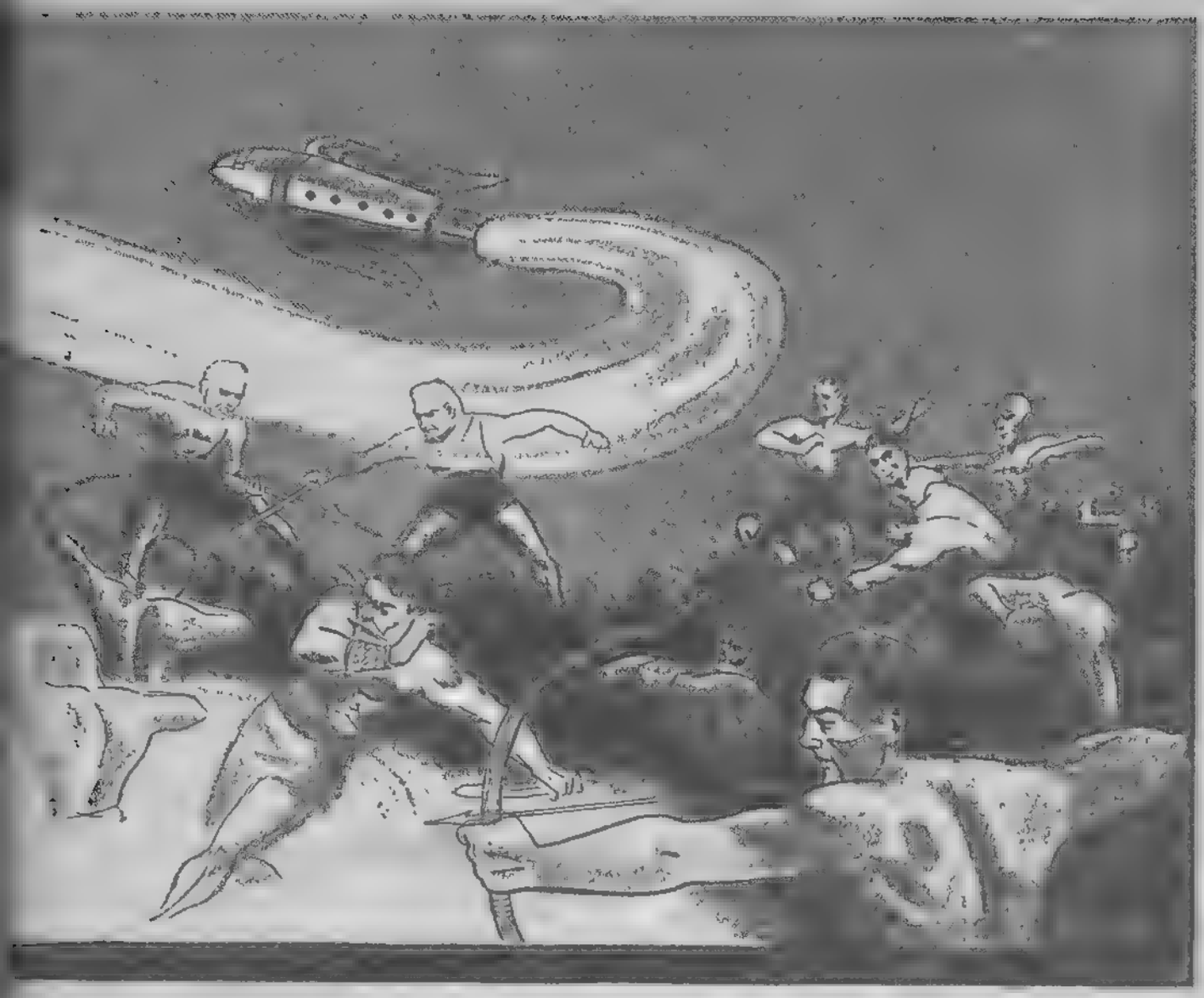
Capture

PERRY stopped, back of the battle line, to pick up a blood-stained sword from a fallen soldier. He caught a riderless charger, for a better mount, and rode yelling into the melee, swinging the shiny weapon.

He knew he wasn't quite sane. Something had gone blank in his mind. To call retreat, bow before a woman, would have torn his pride to shreds. Only one thing beat in his mind—fight, fight!

The peaceful young student was utterly gone. He was completely a warrior, riding to battle.

His wild yells pierced the din of bat-



tle, furious though it was. Men turned, wonderingly, and were instantly inspired. A cluster of his cavalry rallied back of him as the blazing-eyed, roaring demon dashed into the enemy. His sword beat around him like a magic wand that thrust the enemy back.

All the pent-up suspense and energy and rage in Perry went into his sword.

He beat down the saber of a blue-shirted horseman and saw him fall with a gashed shoulder. Another and another. A footman slashed at his legs. Perry met the sword half-way, swept it into the air, stabbed the man through the throat. Another horseman, swordless, swung a huge stone-headed mace at his head. Perry sheared the wooden handle cleanly, stabbed the man's ribs.

All the while he yelled and thrust forward. A hundred fighters had rallied behind him, forming a spearhead that crunched through the enemy ranks.

"Come on, men!" Perry exhorted. "Follow me. Fall on their rear. Down with Lar Tane, tyrant of the—past!"

The last word was a gasp.

A body of horse thundered down on them, blue shirts billowing, sabers swinging. At their head rode Elda Tane! She spied him, urged her horse forward.

It was incredible. Elda riding to battle, a woman, a girl—like Semiramis, the battle-queen. Coppery locks streaming in the wind, emerald eyes snapping, she seemed perfectly at home in the atmosphere of death and destruction. Certainly there was no fear in her eyes, only the light of daring

and challenge.

Perry slowed his horse. Enemy horsemen swept by, to attack his men. They made no move against him. Had Elda given orders to that effect? Why?

Perry saw why. She reined before him, tossed her head in greeting, and raised a gleaming saber.

"Submit—or fight!"

Her clarion voice came clearly through the noise.

Perry grinned suddenly, thinking of the plane episode.

"Bluffing again?" he jeered. "I don't fight women!"

Furthermore, he was in a dangerous position. Elda's fresh cavalry had driven his back. Perry wheeled his horse, to enter the fray and stay with his men. It wouldn't do to be cut off entirely, back of the enemy lines.

But before he had gone half-way, Elda's horse pulled up beside him. Her saber swung down. There was a grim look in her green eyes, now cold as ice. Back of it danced rage, at his biting words. And perhaps at memory of the planes nearly crashing.

PERRY instinctively defended himself, parrying her cut. Again and again she swung, forcing him to rein up and concentrate on saving his skin. She was an attacking fury. Her strong blows clanged on his sword ringingly.

At first grimly amused, Perry quickly found himself using every skill of his own. Her blows were not clumsy. She had at some time learned the use of the saber thoroughly. Perry's own youthful fencing experience was necessary to ward off the attack.

Perry could not bring himself to make an offensive move, at first. But desperation of time forced him. And her mocking smile.

His blood suddenly boiled. This was the one, girl or not, who mocked him with notes, outwitted him on the battlefield, and now actually threatened his life.

"O. K." he panted. "You want it this way—"

He thrust and cut back at her. She laughed, parrying his strokes. For a while they dueled, their swords sparkling in the sun. Humiliation stung Perry, beset and held off by a mere girl.

He rose in his stirrups, pounding viciously. She fell back a little. Perry watched his chance, caught his point in her hand-guard and flipped the weapon out of her hands.

She stared at her empty hand, startled. Then at Perry.

Her face lifted, and the glorious eyes told him he had the right to kill her, as with any man on the battlefield.

Perry raised his sword, cold and appalled at his own resolve.

Kill her? Of course! Why not? She was an enemy, a rebel, herself merciless. With her out of the way, the enemy forces would lack an inspiring leader. She had been ready to kill him a moment before. Every practical consideration in Perry shrieked for the act—and yet he hesitated.

Why? He was staring at her proud, queenly head thrown high, again like the battle-queen Semiramis who knew nothing of the word fear. Her tossed hair was a helmet of copper glory against the ivory of her face, her eyes like twin emeralds. Yet why should he hesitate to destroy such beauty—it was only a mask over a cruel, sinister being who did not even expect mercy!

Her eyes were on him, wide and wondering at his delay.

Perry's upraised weapon was knocked stingingly out of his hand, in the next second. His vision became aware of other things. Some of the

blue-shirted horsemen had returned to protect their girl-commander.

"Surround him!" Elda's voice belled out. "Do not harm him. He is my prisoner."

Perry looked for escape too late. He was unarmed, and within a ring of enemy horsemen. He called down the curse of all the gods on himself. If he had not shrunk from duty, Elda would now be dead, and himself free to gallop for safety.

Now—trapped!

His eyes went beyond the watchful horsemen. The battle line had receded rapidly. His forces, demoralized by the plane strategy and the enemy's swift power-drive were turning into a running rabble. A rout.

Perry stifled the groan that rocked his being. His army beaten, himself a prisoner of war. How miserably he had failed!

ELDA'S commands rang out, to her aides.

"Chase the rebels to the hills. Break them up. Capture as many prisoners as you can. Likely most will join our forces, later. I am returning to Vinna, with my personal prisoner of war."

Her tone became a jeer.

"This, you know, is Perry Knight, who calls himself Lord of Earth!"

She stared around at the men's silent faces.

"Laugh!" she demanded, half furiously.

"We do not laugh at the son of Stirnye," muttered one of the Tribers. It was Chief Hal Doth of Vinna. "He is a brave man."

Perry thrilled. They still respected him, even the enemy! Then he saw their admiring glances at the girl. Chief Doth made a little bow to her.

"And you are brave, Lady Elda. You have broken all attack against us. We will follow wherever you lead."

"I'll lead you to conquest of the world," Elda promised. "Even Nartica. Vinna will be the heart of our World Empire!"

She led Perry toward her plane, with golden swastikas painted under the wings. Perry followed silently, guarded by two men with short swords.

AN HOUR later their plane drummed down over the ruins of ancient Vinna.

Ruins? Perry was startled. Since he had last been here, months before, most of the debris of centuries had been cleared away. Skeleton eyesore towers had been melted down. Several stone structures, still magnificent through time, were obviously to be preserved in memorium, like the Coliseum of more ancient Rome.

But elsewhere new buildings were already going up. It was a beehive of activity, renaissance, reconstruction of olden glory.

Vinna was rising out of the ashes, like New York.

And in its heart, Lar Tane stood again at the top of his tower. His short, stocky figure was straight, head high, as if surveying his soon-to-be empire.

Napoleon! That name flashed out of history, to Perry. Lar Tane was Napoleon reincarnated.

Beside him stood Stuart's tall figure. In a flood, the recent events overwhelmed Perry. Three months before their father alive, the Magna Charta foremost in their thoughts, civilization rumbling to new life. Now Stirnye dead, a world divided, brother against brother, tyranny spawning. And himself prisoner of war!

What would be his fate?

Lar Tane met them in his vaulted chamber, with its significant council

table, Stuart beside him. When the guards left, there were only the four facing one another.

"Victory!" Elda said jubilantly. She brought the first news of the recent battle. "We routed the rebels completely." She gave brief details, then tugged at Perry's sleeve. "And I've brought back a little prisoner of war!"

Stuart had stared with shock at Perry's presence, Lar Tane with pleased surprise.

"You have done well, Commander Elda," Tane said with formality that was ridiculous, and yet not ridiculous. They were not father and daughter, but emperor and military commander. "We will decorate you later with the World Empire Cross. Heil!"

The royal "we."

He inclined his head stiffly toward Perry.

"We greet you, Lord Perry, Chief of the Rebels, as prisoner of war—"

"Rebels!" Perry's tense nerves balked at the term. "You're the rebels!"

Lar Tane spoke imperiously.

"In 2907, the Rebels revolted against my World Empire. Alive in 5000 A.D., by the will of the gods, my World Empire continues. It was the last official government in the 30th century, the first official government in the 50th, with my reincarnation. The Rebel elements wallowed in the Dark Age between. Now they must be put down."

PERRY gasped.

Megalomania, this condensed viewpoint of history through his own eyes. Napoleon, Hitler, and 30th century iron rule combined!

"Words, phrases!" Perry charged. He turned to his brother. "Stuart, can you swallow all this claptrap?"

"Lar Tane is right," Stuart returned coldly. "His World Empire was the crowning peak of civilization. The Rebels smashed it, brought down the Dark Age. That's the plain fact of history. Our father couldn't see it, because he was a thousand years behind, at the mere start of scientific civilization."

"Good God!" Perry groaned. The gulf between this Stuart and the Stuart he had known was bottomless.

Stuart's tones became more practical.

"But most important, Lar Tane knows how to rebuild civilization rapidly and efficiently. Our father puttered for twenty-five years, worrying about self-rule for the Tribers. You and I would have puttered, too, with a slipshod Congress tying our hands. Lar Tane, and I after him, will spread science and industry over the world in the *next* twenty-five years."

"Puttering!" echoed Perry, shocked. "You call it puttering. Our father reinvented a hundred things from his 20th century. He devised the sea-extraction of metals, never known before. Lar Tane and you have all that to start with now."

Tane nodded.

"Of course your father is to be given credit for that," he acknowledged. "But he had come to the crossroads. How to introduce scientific civilization to a Stone Age world? His way was 20th century, obsolete."

"And your way is 30th century—tyrannical!" shot back Perry. "Yes, you will rebuild rapidly, by regimentation. But you leave the clamp of dictatorship. After Stuart—what? A long line of other dictators, good and bad. The bad ones tear down what the good ones build. Then, like Rome, the foundations crack. Another Dark Age."

He appealed to his brother.

"Can't you see, Stuart? It's the future we must think of. We must build

not for one age, but all to come. How many times our father said that. Have you forgotten, Stuart? Have you forgotten it all?"

Stuart was staring, a little startled. Elda stepped to his side, taking his hand.

Perry ground his teeth. The spell of her green eyes—she was using that.

Perry whirled on Lar Tane.

"Words, words!" he snapped. "Strip them all away, reduce everything to its bare essential. Behind all that camouflage, Lar Tane, you want only one thing—*power!* Power to rule over a world of humans. You've duped my brother, you and Elda, but you can't blind me. Power! That's all you want. Deny that if you can."

Tane made an airy gesture.

"*Ach!* I had power—world power—in 2907. It is ashes. You wrong me, Perry. I wish to do the world good, in my own way."

A LAUGH rang from Perry, harsh and cynical.

"Like when, in 2903, you purged central China because they resisted a tax increase!"

Lar Tane glared. His mask of pious suavity dropped.

"All right. I'm after world power, personal power, because it's within my grasp."

The words, slow and measured, startled even Perry. He saw the open gleam in Tane's eye. The gleam of a human wolf who would sit on a throne and play god to a world.

"I can't be stopped now," he went on in cold, dry tones. "You were the only worthy opponent I had, Perry. You're my prisoner now. Still, if you wish, I offer you a place at my council table, along with certain Tribers and Narticans whom I will invite. Well?"

There was no waste of words now. This was sheer plain realism. Lar Tane had come out in the open.

"No," Perry snapped briefly. "I don't want it."

"I sentence you to death," Lar Tane said quietly, indifferently.

He strode to the table and picked up an instrument of shiny metal. It was a rifle-like, a model of the extinct weapons of the past.

"I devised it," Tane said, stroking it. "A gun. It shoots bullets by steam. My Rhine plant is already turning them out in quantity. Our victories over you, Perry, have solidified my tribes behind me. Armed with this gun, my army will now take the offensive. Europe will be mine first. Then Asia, Africa, swiftly. Finally America and Nartica."

He pointed the instrument at Perry, fingering the trigger. Suddenly he laughed and put the gun down.

"*Ach!* It's beneath me. My official executioners will take care of you—in three days. I give you three days of life, Perry. You might change your mind."

Perry didn't answer. He was staring pityingly at his brother.

"I'm more sorry for you than myself, Stuart. Now you see—"

"It doesn't matter if he does," Lar Tane shrugged. "Not now." He addressed Stuart. "Well, which do *you* choose?"

Strangely, Stuart laughed.

"Choose? I made my choice long ago. I am to be your successor!"

Even Lar Tane and Elda were startled.

Perry gasped.

"Stuart, you mean—" He stopped, choking, for the same gleam was in his eye that Tane had.

"Behind it all, I knew what I was after," Stuart said in flat tones. "I haven't been duped. I want power, too.

You won't live long, Lar Tane. As with my father, your heart will stop suddenly, after its journey through time. After that, I rule. Elda and I."

Perry reeled and the universe reeled with him. This Stuart was not even remotely the Stuart of old. What had changed him?

Perry's eyes went toward the girl beside him.

"Green-eyed witch of hell!" he hissed.

Guards came to take Perry away, at Lar Tane's order. He was led down steps to a cold, dank chamber below Tane's tower of rule. Perry was the first of a long line of prisoners who would sit here and await execution.

CHAPTER XVII

You Die at Dawn!

PERRY sat alone, in candle-lit gloom. It was silent as a tomb. Scurrying rats made the only sounds, outside of his own breathing. A jailer came with food and water twice a day. The rest of the time, Perry staggered through the hell of his mind.

Three figures swirled endlessly through his brain. Lar Tane, power-mad Frankenstein from the past. Stuart, betrayer of a world. And Elda, green-eyed witch who had stolen his brother's soul.

And a fourth vision danced in his mind. Himself, blindfolded, against a wall, slumping to the ground as bullets took his life. Lar Tane would undoubtedly have it done that way, with his new gun.

The door opened suddenly, after what seemed an eternity. Lar Tane strode in, dismissing the guards with him. He looked at Perry's haggard face for a long moment.

"Changed your mind, *mein herr?* You have a scientific brain. Pity to destroy it. I'll make you chief of science and industry, as with your father. What would you lose?"

"My self-respect," Perry retorted.

"Will you have it—dead?" Lar Tane visibly sneered. "Knowing your cause is lost?"

"You haven't won yet, Tane!" Perry shouted. "America and Nartica still oppose you, even without me. If I joined you, they would capitulate, making things easy for you. I see that. Without me, you still have a fight ahead of you."

"But certain victory," Lar Tane said easily. "You saw the gun I quickly devised. It was modeled after a relic preserved with me in my vault, from my time. I have another interesting model. A heat-ray projector, standard weapon of my day. With the radioactive wax your father developed, ten times more powerful than radium, I can make heat-ray projectors.* How long do you think America and Nartica will stand against super-science?"

"Bluff!" snapped Perry. "Like your daughter, you bluff."

"You think so?" Tane grinned. Suddenly his voice crackled. "One more chance, Perry. My council table or execution?"

Perry's answer was written on his face, sneeringly.

Tane shrugged and stalked out.

Alone, Perry's shoulders sagged. Bluff? Perhaps not. Bullets, heat-rays, appalling weapons of a war age. Lar Tane digging them up, conquering a world. After that a Pax Romana, enforced peace. All the mistakes of the past rising like gibbering ghosts.

* Obviously the wax mentioned here has a property of breaking down radium and a greatly accelerated pace, thus producing enormous amounts of energy. If this is possible, it is true that a heat ray could be produced from radium energy.—Ed.

And he, Perry, with Hobson's choice. With no choice at all!

Alive or dead, Lar Tane was benefitted. Better dead, then.

A night of sleep came, filled with horrifying visions. Battlefields in which men waded knee-deep in blood. His army fleeing before one-eyed giants. Perry, alone, surrounded by a forest of steel swords. . . .

THE next day, the door opened again, in the dank chamber. Stuart entered. Brother stared at brother. Neither spoke a greeting. Stuart broke the strained silence finally.

"Perry, listen to me," he said firmly. "After Lar Tane is gone, I'll rule justly, I swear it. You'll be at my side, as our father wished. The only difference is that we'll be without handicap. Father didn't reason it out. The world has to be whipped from behind, not led by the nose. At least this Stone Age world."

Perry's voice was dry, biting.

"Words. Why not be honest? You simply want power. And Elda."

Stuart's face hardened.

"Yes, both. And you, you poor little fool, throw what you could have aside. Power! Power to build and mold—"

His eyes gleamed.

"And destroy," Perry was shaking his head pityingly. "Remember when we were youths, Stuart? How often we told ourselves history had been a repetition of jungle law? And told ourselves we would bring a new order, a new faith. Remember when we shook hands, after the Magna Charta—"

His voice died. The silent room seemed filled with apparitions from their youth, faces glowing and alight, looking out over the world that lay ready for a new faith, a new way.

Stuart started from reminiscence.

"Dreams! Young, foolish dreams, that's all." His voice was hard. "What's your answer, Perry?"

"Lar Tane sent you down." Perry's voice was equally hard. "He knows my answer."

Stuart left wordlessly.

Perry released the groan he had held. Nothing would ever come between them, they had pledged.

Again tortured dreams. A green-eyed Amazon, tall as Colossus, towered over him with a sword dripping scarlet. Perry woke in a cold sweat. It was the morning of the third day.

ELDA entered, suddenly, as though she had sent the dream of her as warning. She leaned against the door, indolently, watching him.

"You're suffering," she said mockingly. "Needlessly," she added. "Your execution is today. You'll break down."

"Will I?" Perry grinned mirthlessly at her. "Did I—when your plane came at mine that time?"

She bit her lip, nettled.

"No, perhaps you wouldn't," she said soberly. "But you're a fool. An idealist, dreamer, altruist, and all the rest of it. You're that quaint character from ancient literature—what is it? —Don Quixote, chasing down windmills. You're going to be a haloed martyr, is that it?"

Perry set his lips, wordlessly. The sting of her words was like acid under his skin.

She was staring at him mockingly—and wonderingly. Suddenly she changed.

"What do you think of me, Perry?"

He started, almost convulsively. A woman's question. He laughed silently within himself. Behind all her hard composure was that.

"What do you expect me to think

of you?" he retorted. "You and your father have plunged the world into war. Human wolves from the past, I'd call you. Seeking power, to lord it over all other human beings. Satisfying petty vanity. Glorying in the thoughts that your slightest whim will be law—"

"No, no," she interrupted. "What do you think of *me?*"

"You asked for it." He grinned evilly and went on. "I think you're depraved, rotten to the core, behind your mask of beauty. You're the end-product of a ruined, decadent civilization. You're human in name only. Behind that you're a monster, a black-souled demon, a—"

She cut off his torrential denunciation.

"Taking it out on me now? You couldn't on the battlefield." Again her tone changed. "But you *do* think I'm beautiful!"

Perry gritted his teeth helplessly.

"Your mirror tells you that," he snapped. "But it doesn't show what's underneath—corruption."

Strong words, but she deserved them.

Her eyes flashed emerald fire.

"How righteous! It would defile you to touch me, wouldn't it?"

Smiling maliciously, she threw her arms around him, kissed him clingingly.

Perry hesitated, before he pushed her away. He hesitated as he had there on the battlefield, with her life in his hands. She was at once hateful and desirable. He couldn't hate her wholeheartedly, as he should. When he did push her away, she laughed triumphantly.

"You love me!" she said. "You burn for me! I wasn't sure till now."

"YOU?" Perry's voice dripped with infinite scorn. "Green-eyed witch of hell! You can't make me your slave, like Stuart. Your father sent you down. Tell him you failed."

Deliberately, he looked her up and down.

"Your price is too low."

Flaming indignation shot from her emerald eyes. She clutched at her side as though for a sword that wasn't there. Then, with silent ferocity, she leaped at him. One hand clawed across his face, fingernails drawing blood.

Perry caught her two wrists, laughing.

She struggled wildly. She did not call the guards. It wasn't in her nature to call for help. She simply fought for freedom, to scratch him again. She had amazing strength, but Perry's fingers tightened. The past months of open air, activity, and rough life had hardened his muscles.

With an easy surge of strength, he twisted till a silent scream came into the green eyes. Then he flung her away, again with a laugh.

"Your price," he repeated, "is too low. Get out."

She glared at him, rubbing her wrists. Abruptly, she shrugged.

"Yes, my father sent me down. But only to talk reason with you. Since you won't, I'll go. You're still a fool. And when you die, your last thought will be of me—me!"

When she was gone, Perry forbade her in his thoughts. He wanted a last hour of peace. But she was there—entrancingly lovely. Mocking. No, not mocking. He always saw her as in the plane, roaring at his—just a frightened girl. A headstrong, queenly, daring girl, but human behind it all, despite his bitter words. Perhaps if a man tamed her—

Where were his thoughts leading him? Perry clipped them off. What did it all matter now? Death today. He awaited the guards who would take

him before a firing squad.

BUT there was a sound opposite the barred door, instead.

A digging sound through the dirt wall that made up one side of the prison space. It became louder and finally the digger broke through. A spade rapidly cleared a four-foot circle. A figure stooped through and straightened —Stuart!

Perry stared incredulously.

Stuart tip-toed to the door, listened for a moment, then pulled Perry aside. He waved toward the hole.

"Subway tunnel of ancient Vinna runs by here. This is only a temporary tower. Lar Tane is having a bigger one built. He didn't bother to wall off the tunnel with concrete. You can escape, when it's dark. The execution isn't scheduled till dawn."

Perry was almost giddy at the hope of escape, and Stuart's act.

"You saw the light, Stuart?" he murmured eagerly. "You're coming with me! Together we'll lead a great army against Lar Tane—"

Stuart interrupted harshly.

"No, I'm staying. But I couldn't let you die. You're my brother. I tried to change Lar Tane's sentence, but he refused. I thought of this."

Perry stiffened, and brother stared at brother.

"You're staying." Perry curled his lip. "You want power. And Elda. You've sold your soul for that!"

Stuart recoiled as if struck. For a moment, his face was stricken. Then anger swept over it.

"No more nurse-maid lectures from you!" he hissed. "This is a man's world. Man's job. Get out—get out!"

Anger dissolved, abruptly. Stuart's face went haggard.

"I don't want power. Perry, you must believe me! I just told Lar Tane that, to keep in his favor. You see, it's the only way I can have Elda. When I rule, I'll do the world good. I swear it!"

Perry shook his head.

"A taste of power will call for more. Don't you see, Stuart? You know it's against your better judgment. Only Elda holds you—"

"Yes, Elda!" Stuart half moaned. "Perry, you don't know the witchery of her. The unearthly spell she weaves over a man. The flaming challenge and desire and wonder of her. You don't know—"

"I do know!" Perry's murmur changed to harshness. "But behind that, she's unworthy—venomous, cruel, utterly vain."

"No, you're wrong!" Stuart muttered. "She's not cruel, or bad. She's just a product of her former time and life. She believes in what she's doing. And underneath her mockery she's good and sweet and wonderful. I'm going to tame her—"

"INDEED!"

Both men whirled as if shot.

Elda Tane stood erect before the hole in the wall, through which she had just stepped silently. Tall and regal, silken-robed, she came forward slowly. She glanced amusedly at Stuart.

"A woman is tamed only by love," she mocked.

The blood slowly drained from Stuart's face.

"But you love me! You told me—"

"Did I?" she said cruelly.

Stuart grabbed her by the shoulders.

"You mean all the while, from the first, you deceived me, lied to me—"

Staggered shock was in his eyes.

For a moment the girl softened.

"No, not from the first. For a while I thought—" She shrugged indifferently. "I've wondered if I'd ever find a man I could look up to, and love. I

think not, 30th century or 50th. I'd throw aside an empire for him!"

She was wistful suddenly, in a mercurial change that seemed part of her complex nature. In the candle-light, her ivory and copper beauty shone softly, like Diana the moon-goddess, in a quiet moment from her tempestuous life. The emerald eyes gleamed sincerely now, not mocking.

The two men stared. She was not the battle-queen Semiramis now, or an Amazon. She was a young girl, feminine and alluring, seeking her love. Seeking a man who would melt her vibrant heart, bend her strong will, match her daring with greater courage.

Perry almost pitied her, at that moment. Endowed by nature with extraordinary qualities, she was forced to seek vainly for her master. What man could bring murmurs of endearment from those perfect lips?

She laughed wildly, in a lightning change.

"But he doesn't exist! So, instead, I'll have a man who can give me an empire!"

"I'll give you an empire!" Stuart whispered. He was over his first shock. Perhaps he had known, subtly, that he hadn't won her heart. He remembered now the plaintive song she had sung, once. The song had been of herself.

She flashed him a smile, then glanced at Perry.

"And you, Herr Perry? Wouldn't you give me an empire—if you could?"

"Women have sold themselves all through history," Perry said bitingly. "Your stakes are only higher."

Her composure was unbroken, this time, though for a moment tawny rage flicked from her eyes. She laughed away the insult, turning to Stuart.

"You wanted to help Perry escape? I happened to see you going out, furtively. I followed you, came this way. My father won't like to hear that you did this."

"You'll tell on him, of course," Perry grunted.

Suddenly, the reminder of escape struck Perry. Elda saw his glance at the hole. Her hand dropped warningly to her side. There was the hilt of a short sword this time, whose scabbard was almost hidden in the folds of her silken gown. She stood nearest the hole.

Perry relaxed, hopelessly. Any other woman and he would have leaped for it. But Elda—she would have that sword out in a flash. And use it.

"No," she said. "I won't tell. But escape is out of the question. You'd better leave now, Stuart. My father may wonder, with both of us gone. I'll follow later, so we aren't seen coming out of the tunnel together. Then I'll station guards at the hole."

Stuart left with averted eyes. He turned back once as though to say something, but went on. Perry could sense the torment in his heart. Elda had knocked the last prop out from under him. Stuart was dangling over a pit of remorse.

CHAPTER XVIII

Green-eyed Mystery

STUART gone, Elda turned back to Perry, her green eyes narrowing.

"I give you one more chance. Join my father's council table."

She went on at the stony resolve in his face.

"You really choose death? You must be mad. But listen. You both love me. I have made no binding promise to Stuart. You would have as much chance as he of becoming my father's successor. And giving me an empire! My father didn't tell me to say that."

"Then why are you saying it?" Perry shrugged. "I don't take dares—as you know."

Her eyes were on him wonderingly.

"You'll go to your death—as a martyr—when you could have me. And you want me!"

"Do I?" Perry turned from the glare of her unearthly beauty, stonily. "I think you're mistaken—"

The rest was cut off as her lips pressed against his. She had thrown her arms around him in a flurry of silk. A breath of perfume from her coppery tresses stung his blood. Her features, soft and tender, were an unvoiced promise. She was a young, loving girl, shorn of pride and haughtiness. So it seemed.

For a mad moment Perry made no move, either to break away or respond. Then, with a curse, he shoved her away. He had seen the gleam of mockery in her eyes.

"You won on the battlefield," he grated. "You lose here."

"But you burn for me!" she breathed. "I'm sure of it now. Why didn't you grab my sword, Perry? You had the chance. Because, in my arms, you forget all else! Yes, it's the truth. But still—"

Her voice went to sheer wonder.

"But still you take death! Strange." She looked at him as if he were someone she had never seen before. "You place your ideals above me, above every instinct you have."

She shrugged, faintly annoyed.

"Yes, I lose this time. You fight better with your heart than with your army, Perry."

She peered at him steadily. Perry said nothing. He could feel her thoughts spinning, whirring, looking for another vulnerable spot in his armor. She seemed to give up, with a nettled sigh.

Perry grinned. How it must hurt her fantastic pride that her full feminine powers had met defeat, though she had beaten him in war. To Perry, it almost made up for all previous humiliation. She had beaten him in a man's game, war. But in her own woman's game, she had lost.

She fingered her sword, as though contemplating making him cringe at instant death.

"Try it," he challenged, laughing at her swift frown.

"Come," she said suddenly, turning. "It's dark outside now."

"WHAT—" Perry was stunned.

"Escape, of course," she snapped. "Follow me."

Perry followed, grunting. Outside somewhere, with the wine of hope on his lips, she would call the guards, then laugh hellishly as he was dragged back. That was her idea—in revenge. But if she was a little careless, just a little! Perry smiled grimly.

Beyond the hole stretched black nothingness. Not quite black. Far ahead, moonlight shafted down from open air. Perry followed her gliding white figure. At times his feet stumbled against rust-eaten ties and ancient tracks of this one-time subway. Once a pile of something rattled. He shuddered.

"Bones," Elda murmured. "At the fall of Vinna, 2000 years ago, the rebels filled the city with poison gas. Sometimes it all seems like a dream to me, that past I used to live in—" Her voice trailed away.

They reached the slope that led to upper ground, through a narrow cave-in. The girl scrambled up, raised her head cautiously.

"All clear. But be quiet."

He climbed after her, and stood looking around. Lar Tane's tower was a hundred yards off. In the vicinity were the foundations of new buildings going

up, deserted now of workmen. In the opposite direction loomed the less cleared portions of the Vinna ruins. Toward these Elda led the way, striding swiftly, keeping within shadow.

Perry kept tense watch. Elda touched his hand, stopping him, and pointed ahead. A guard, or policeman, paced ahead, patrolling this section of grounds. Elda led the way around a bulking stone wall.

Perry held his breath. Any moment now she would suddenly call, and laugh to watch the chase as the guards ran him down. But she didn't call. Safely past, Perry clutched her arm.

"What are you doing?" he demanded. "What trick is this?"

She seemed surprised.

"No trick. I'm leading you to escape. To the river."

They passed five other patrolling guards, penetrating finally into the wilder, untouched ruins. Perry heard the gurgle of water before they eventually came to the shore. The Danube stretched dark and mysterious into the night.

Elda pointed to a little skiff tied to a post.

"My own. I sometimes rowed on the river, before the war. You have ten hours of darkness, to go downstream. If you get past the Maginot Line at Budapest before dawn, you're safe."

"But why are you doing this?" Perry gasped.

"You saved my life once, or spared it, on the battlefield. I'm paying off the debt."

Perry shook his head, baffled, staring at her. Despite his present position, he sought to view her objectively.

In the moonglow, her beauty was extravagant. Burnished sheen of copper hair, glowing ivory face, emerald eyes muted to sea-green. This seemed a different Elda from all the others. An Elda who for once was not mocking. The conspiracy of moon and night reached inside Perry and left him trembling, stricken. He battled a war of senses, more desperately than on the battlefield.

SHE was lovely, desirable, sincere, behind the mask she had worn. She was woman now—all woman. This was the Elda Stuart loved. Perry's pulses thundered, and he knew in another moment no power on Earth could help him.

He fought against it.

"Elda," he said slowly, "this is your own idea. Not one word from me caused you to do this. Of your own free will you brought me here, to escape—"

"Yes," she agreed, in a low voice.

Perry trembled. How long could he stand it? It seemed that something pushed him resistlessly, inexorably.

"Then I say it now—I love you!" He crushed her in his arms, bruising his lips against hers. She yielded. He drew back finally, searching her eyes eagerly.

"Elda, is it possible that you—"

She made no denial. She clung to him a little.

"I'll give you an empire," he panted. "But my kind. Come with me! I'll defeat your father, since I must. Then you and I will guide the world to great things, glorious things. The things you know are right, deep down inside. Elda, Elda! Come with me—"

Perry stopped. His blood froze.

Elda was laughing. Very quietly, very softly, but with a world of derision in it. Perry stared stupidly, while his mind flopped around like a bewildered thing. And then he knew.

Tricked! He had been tricked into succumbing to her, confessing that which she wanted to hear, as a woman. Did she have guards concealed about, ready to call them, and complete his humiliation?

Wildly, Perry turned for the skiff.

"Wait!" She clutched his arm. "There are no guards here. Before you go, listen. I know you'll continue the war, I know you'll fight to the end. Perhaps you'll win, who knows? But all the while you're fighting against me, you'll be fighting *for* me! I meant every word—that the man who gives me an empire wins me."

She laughed.

"Go out and fight for your World-State, Perry. Go out and fight to win me! Do you see, you great fool? You cast me aside, before. Now you have to fight for me, and against me. But always for *me!*"

She laughed again, ringingly.

"You didn't think for a minute, did you, that you were the man who doesn't exist—"

PERRY fled. Fled from that hellishly mocking laugh. He untied the skiff, shoved off. He bent to the paddle, heading for mid-stream. He looked back once.

She still stood on the bank, a white vision of loveliness. Her coppery hair was like a burning flame that drove him frantically away. It was not till an hour later, as the strong current swept him steadily southeast, that he was able to keep from ripping the air with a curse, every moment he thought of her.

What had he done? What mad thing had he said to her! Mad thing? No, why try to conceal it from himself? She had burned her way into him. From that first moment, in New York, she had lodged unshakably in his innermost thoughts. Those quiet moments in the laboratory, before the war, thinking of her. Yes, he burned for her. Let the universe stare in horror, but it was so.

And then he cursed again, for ever having let her know.

But gradually, his thoughts grew composed. He forgot the green-eyed girl and the incredible game it delighted her to play. Escape lay ahead, if he slipped beyond enemy territory before dawn. And after that, a chance again to fight Lar Tane.

Life and hope once more were his.

Perry paddled desperately, steadily, not satisfied with the current. Muscles aching, he passed the Maginot fortifications at ancient Budapest, as the first rosy gleams of dawn warmed the air. He had a bad moment as a yawning guard, easily within arrow-shot, stretched and looked out over the water. But the guard didn't notice the skiff, in the early mist. He was there more to watch against invasion inward, than escaping prisoners outward.

Perry paddled till noon, safely beyond the nearer tribal-states that might happen to be loyal to Lar Tane, and stepped to shore. Staggered, rather, into a shore village.

"Your best horse," he demanded hoarsely, of the first man. Taken before the chief, Perry croaked again: "Your best horse!"

"I give commands, not hear them," rumbled the chief. "What wandering madman are you—"

"It's Perry, Lord of Earth!" gasped one of his men, penetrating the grime and haggardness that rode the stranger. "He escaped from captivity by Lar Tane!"

Perry cut off the exclamation of awe and excitement.

"Yes. Now tell me, is any of my army—left?"

The chief nodded.

"We heard that most of it rebanded in the hills preparing to attack again. Aran Deen leads them."

"Defense not attack!" Perry groaned. "Where's that horse?"

"But Lord Perry, you're worn out—"

Perry refused to believe it till he

leaped astride, and collapsed in the saddle. He hadn't slept, except for nightmarish snatches in prison, for four nights. After sleeping half the clock around, at the chief's house, he was off.

He passed through three tribal-states, killing two horses, and changing five times before he reached his army, already on the march.

ARAN DEEN'S rheumy old eyes blinked as Perry galloped up.

"Perry!" he shrilled out. "It can't be you!"

He shrugged his bony shoulders. "Well, it is you. I reformed the army. Told them we must rescue you. They are ready to fight, as never before, with that spirit to drive them."

He looked around, half whimsically. "Perhaps we should keep you hidden!"

But already the news was sweeping the ranks that Perry, their leader, had returned. Cheers arose. Perry's heart leaped. It was good to know that despite the series of losses, his men were still behind him. Lar Tane had not yet won his world.

Perry noticed fleetingly that here and there a "Hail, Stirnye!" sounded, without being taken up. He had done nothing to win that "title" of his father's yet.

"I'm glad you're back," Aran Deen said suddenly, grasping Perry's hand and pressing it fervently. "When you were a little boy, you often drove me distracted like this, wandering somewhere alone—"

He glared belligerently, at Perry's smile, and again became phlegmatic.

"Glad for the simple reason that leading an army is not to my taste. With you to lead again, we'll smash through—"

"No!" Perry shook his head violently. "Not attack. Defense is what we need now!"

"Defense!" Aran Deen screeched. "Perry, has that green-eyed witch taken all the spirit out of you?"

At that moment a drone sounded from the sky.

Perry glanced anxiously to the north. Lar Tane's twelve planes zoomed down like mechanical eagles. In a wide line, they swept over the stalled army. But not to rake it with heat-blasts. Instead, as though struck by invisible lightning, men dropped here and there. No arrow, no spear—nothing visible leaped from the ships. But men dropped.

"Bullets!" groaned Perry. "Bullets from the steam-guns."

Whirling, he shouted orders for the army to break for cover, every man for himself. As the army straggled in all directions, toward the nearest clumps of trees and bushes, the planes looped and executed their maneuver a dozen more times. More men fell, though less as they scattered.

Perry saw the shining snouts attached to the planes' noses. Listening intently, he made out the hissing barks of the weapons. They were not rapid-fire machine-guns. Merely mounted rifles. Only a few dozen men fell, altogether. A first field test of the guns, nothing more.

But the moral effect on the Stone Age army was all out of proportion. Many shrieked in superstitious fear, as they ran. Invisible death—magic! An arrow, spear or sword was something you could see, fend off. This hurling down of silent lightning struck dumb fear in Stone Age breasts.

Perry cursed lividly.

When the men had run to cover, finally, one of the planes left formation, darted toward him. He was still in the open. Coppery flash of hair! He saw it before he saw the kicks of dust around him.

"Perry, we must run—"

The plane was past, the danger over, before Aran Deen finished the words.

THE gunner had not been able to aim. Gun-fire from fast aircraft could only be effective against masses of men. Perry knew it had been a mocking gesture on Elda's part. A threat of the future.

He picked up the note, wrapped around a stone, that had also dropped, a hundred feet ahead.

"To Perry, Lord of Earth, pro-tem. I am on the march. This is Der Tag. We have guns. Win your empire if you can—and me! Fight as you've never fought before—for me! Defeat me, if you can—and still I'll win! Elda."

"What does it mean?" mumbled Aran Deen. "What nonsense does the green-eyed witch write?" His canny old eyes searched Perry's face suddenly. "Or does it mean, my son—"

"It means," broke in Perry harshly, "that you're an old fool. We have to go on the defensive. Dig trenches, as in the long-ago wars."

And it meant, too, that the war had passed into a new and terrible phase. That the thunder of guns would once more wake to ravening life, devouring its cannon-fodder food.

Perry looked at the still forms shot down, out in the open. He was appalled.

In the name of the universe, when and where would all this end?

CHAPTER XIX

Mannerheim Line

PERRY hastily reformed the army and marched it back—back.

Consulting the Atlas, he picked the narrowest strip between the impassable Alps and the Adriatic Sea. Here, they dug in. Laborers and additional fighters were recruited.

In a week's time a series of trenches lay athwart the open drive to the Mediterranean. A little Maginot Line. The weapons of the past called for the defenses of the past.

Scouting in a plane over enemy territory, Perry found Elda's army on the march, as she had said. A formidable force now of 25,000. Lar Tane's tribal-states were now solidly back of him. Perry made out the units equipped with the new, shiny guns. He breathed easier. Only some ten thousand. With just one metal-producing plant, and a limited staff of technicians, Lar Tane had not been able to turn out more, for the present.

Elda's army arrived, and attacked immediately.

Little sorties of gun troops rushed toward the first line of trenches, dropped on their stomachs, and began firing.

Perry felt cold, shaken. Guns again! Their deadly bark ripped apart the Stone Age air, in chorus, for the first time in an age. His father had told him of the frightful wars of the 20th century, when guns snuffed out lives in unthinkable numbers.

"Lar Tane has this day turned history into bloodier channels," Aran Deen murmured.

Men dropped here and there in the long trenches. Perry groaned. What chance did he have? Bullets outclassed spears and arrows by a tremendous margin. Morale dropped. Again his men were grunting in fear and dread at this magic death-dealing.

Perry's heart stopped. Had all been lost? Had the first roar of guns already won for Elda? White-faced Tribers, frightened to the roots of their being, seemed ready to bolt. Ready to scurry from the trenches like rabbits.

Perhaps at that moment, the fate of the war hung by a thin thread. . . .

Perry ran down the trench, shouting.

"Keep your heads low! The weapon is not magic. If you run, death will strike at your backs. Here, you are safe. Fire back at the enemy. But keep your heads low!"

Some of the men took heart. Longbows twanged and arrows sped out toward the enemy. Some of the men with guns, insolently running close, fell dead. A cheer welled from the trench. And that strange, intangible thing called morale revived.

The acid test had been passed. Perry, panting, exhausted, realized he still had a chance.

And more of a chance, he began to see, than he had thought possible.

A WAVE of enemy swordsmen came. Perry's men, in the protective trenches, stopped them with arrow fusillades.

"The green-eyed witch is getting a taste of her own medicine," Aran Deen chortled. "Now *her* men fall like leaves before our Maginot Line."

But Perry was still not too optimistic. The first day was experimental. Elda's scouting planes told her the defenders were solidly entrenched.

On the second day, the bark of guns became a steady hissing roar. Planes periodically r a i d e d the first line trenches, doing little damage—except to morale. That was what Elda counted on, Perry could see. A steady hammering with the "artillery" till the time was ripe.

Still awed by the fearful magic of guns, Perry's men could not outface that hail of death forever. Men dropped steadily, despite his cautions. These were not seasoned troops of yore, used to the invisible death that struck at the mere lifting of a forehead to fire an arrow.

Perry wondered how it would come out. This was war such as the ancients fought. The kind of war Elda knew from A to Z. Did he stand any chance of holding her off? For a while, perhaps—and then?

Guns! He must have them himself! In the back of his mind, that thought had constantly lurked. Fight fire with fire. Ultimately, it would be the only hope.

His eye went out beyond the trenches. Here and there a rifleman dropped, struck by an arrow. He noticed with what promptness crawling men retrieved the weapons. They were precious, those few guns. And Elda did not want one in his hands.

"I've got to have one of those guns," Perry told Aran Deen. "A suicide squad has to rush out there."

"In that leaden hail? You won't find a man to go."

"They'll go if I lead them." Perry shook off Aran Deen's hand, eyes burning. "It's the only way, old man. I must have a gun—to duplicate. Without guns, we're sure to lose the war. If I'm killed, it's the chance I take of winning all or losing all."

Grimly, a hundred v o l u n t e e r s squirmed on their stomachs after Perry, beyond their trench. Perhaps the hundred bravest men in all his army. It took a new kind of courage to defy the new kind of death. They crawled fifty feet before the enemy noticed. Then concentrated rifle fire drummed into them. Figures went limp.

Perry shouted to his remaining men and went on. A rifle lay only a hundred feet further, beside a dead man. An enemy force suddenly charged down. But from back of Perry came covering arrow-fire. Perry and thirty men, scuttling low, reached the rifle.

Perry grabbed it first.

Some of the enemy arrived. Swords leaped into play. Perry cut down two

men. A third came at his side, sword already slashing viciously.

INSTINCTIVELY, Perry jerked the gun around, pulling the trigger. The man stopped as though he had struck a stone wall, his sword's unfinished swing gashing Perry's leg lightly.

For a second Perry stood still. He had fired a gun for the first time in his life. He would never forget, to his dying day, that vicious little kick of the gun, the way the man stopped, and the feeling of immense death-dealing power of that moment.

Then he was scuttling back for his trench, yelling to his remaining men. More than one bullet whined past his ear, singing of death. He and eleven men reached safety, out of the hundred.

"Here's the gun!" Perry examined it, hardly waiting for his leg-wound to be dressed. "Clever of Lar Tane," he told Aran Deen an hour later. "Water-breech. Radioactive flint. Bullets of soft alloy, driven out by bursts of steam. Simple enough. Our Gibraltar plant can turn these out within a month."

"If we can hold Elda off for a month," Aran Deen croaked. "Tomorrow, a real attack—"

On the third day, the guns rose to a thunderous crescendo, raking the trenches mercilessly. Suddenly their bull-roar ceased. Hun-like tides of the enemy raided the first-line trench with swords. At the end of a bloody day, Perry retreated to his second line.

"It goes bad for us," Aran Deen observed.

"Yes." Perry set his jaw. "But I think our army can hold out. As fast as they gain a line of trenches, we dig another line in back. They'll have to fight inch by inch. This is not a three-day battle, as in the open. It might take Elda a month to smash through. In that time, we'll make guns. You and I are going to Gibraltar."

Calling his officers together, Perry gave them an impassioned exhortation.

"Hold off the enemy at all costs. Dig trenches behind as fast as the front lines are taken. Hold them off for a month. And then I promise you guns, like theirs. If they break through, all Europe is lost!"

A month to stem the invasion. Was there time?

CHAPTER XX

Thunder of Old

BACK in his Gibraltar workshop, Perry felt as though he had returned from some shrieking purgatory.

It was quiet here, peaceful. He looked around at the implements of science, touching them. Had he once worked here, a young eager scientist? Or had it been a poignant dream? It seemed he had been fighting, seeing men die, all his life.

It suddenly overwhelmed him.

Yes, he had once labored here, in monastic devotion to science. He had been happy, soul-satisfied, sure of his mission. Now he was back. But not to resume his constructive tasks. To make weapons of war! To make the power and engines at his command grind out guns, horrible guns. Like Archimedes and his burning lens, Perry had to help prolong the blood-bath into which the world was being dipped.

For worse than even years of war would be years of domination under Lar Tane's mailed fist, followed by years of rule by Elda, and her love-slave Stuart. The fight against that was a good fight.

Renewed in his resolve, Perry switched to his new role of scientist swiftly. Time still snapped savagely at his heels. He took Lar Tane's gun

apart, piece by piece, and made blueprints. These he passed out to his staff of technicians, with orders to drop the manufacture of swords.

Overnight, swords had fallen from first place, as major weapons of the war. As, a few months before, Stone Age spears and arrows had been demoted before swords. Swift change. The war, with each passing day, pyramided toward higher destruction. Like a film of past history run at superspeed, the war had already skipped insanely through three stages, each a former age of slow advance.

Perry was appalled. The next skip would be to Lar Tane's century—and horrors beyond telling.

Within a week, the first model had been put together. Perry tested it himself. The trigger struck the radioactive flint, releasing infra-red energy, like a touch of dynamite. A coincident spray of water changed instantly to live, bursting steam, in the stout waterbreech. The alloy bullet was propelled out of the barrel at violent speed.

The 20th century might have made such steam-guns, if they had had the radioactive flint unknown at that time.

Perry's quick mind made one improvement in the gun—rifling in the barrel. Lar Tane had apparently turned his out too hurriedly to bother. Perry was able to hit a foot-high target hung on a tree, at a hundred paces, five shots out of ten.

It was not the finely-made precision instrument of the 20th or 30th centuries. That would take years of development. It was little more than a crude, improved blow-gun, shooting metal pellets instead of darts. But it could kill.

On the eleventh shot, the breech exploded.

Luckily, in forethought, Perry had protected his face with a light metal shield. Pieces of flying metal drummed against it harmlessly. One piece tore a gash in his arm, to replace the sword-gash in his leg, now nearly healed.

"Make the breech stronger," Perry said to his watching technicians. "Outside of that, it's what we want."

The real job started, turning out the guns in quantity.

Presses, stamping machines and lathes had to be readjusted to the new requirements. Days flew. A plane shuttled back and forth from the northern battle-front to Gibraltar, bringing spot-news of the struggle there.

Perry held his breath each time the messenger came, dreading to hear that Elda had stormed through his little Maginot Line. But his army held. The enemy had taken ten lines of trenches, in three weeks, but the defenders had kept pace with their digging in at the rear. More cheering, his army had become trench-wise, veterans against the new guns. The enemy was losing heavily.

"Mannerheim Line," mused Aran Deen, searching misty memories he had of accounts of long-ago historical battles. "In your father's century, a little nation called, I think, Finland held out for months against the gigantic military machine of China. Or was it Russia?"

IN ANOTHER week, just under his self-imposed deadline of a month, Perry had whipped his staff, on day and night shift, to turn out five thousand of the new guns. His twenty Nartican planes droned back and forth to the battle-ground, delivering them and their ammunition.

Perry went with the first shipment. Passing out the guns to a corps of men at the rear, they were given rifle practice. Amazed and awed, the men quickly became delighted, learning fast to sight along the barrel—there were no

"Mannerheim Line," mused Aran Deen. "Finland . . . or was it Russia?"

sights—and slip bullets into the breech rapidly.

They were single-shot guns, as with Lar Tane's. A far cry from the automatic rifles and machine-guns of lost antiquity, but incalculably more effective in range and death-dealing than arrows or swords.

"Now," exulted Perry, "we'll fight them to a standstill!"

His trained corps of five thousand were in the front-line trenches. At dawn, enemy "artillery" began its preparatory raking, prior to attack. No shot came from Perry's men, at his orders. Not even when waves of swordsmen charged.

"Wait till you see the whites of their eyes!"

Perry's command rang down the line, a phrase borrowed from the past.

Perry rested his own rifle on a sandbag, sighting along the barrel. He fired the first shot. At the signal, a volley thundered from the trench. The enemy fell as though mown down by an invisible scythe. A second and third volley thinned the attack to a straggly line. At the fourth volley, the enemy stopped, dumfounded at the sudden decimation. At the fifth volley, the survivors turned and ran in utter panic.

A tremendous cheer welled from the trenches. Perry joined with a shout of triumph. No more attack came that day. The lion was licking its wounds. In the lull, Perry wrote a note.

"TO Elda, Commander of World Empire Military. Burned your fingers, didn't you? You won't break through now. I have superior manpower to draw from, over Earth. If I need them, the factories of Nartica can turn out limitless guns, much faster than your single Rhine plant. I am ready at any time to hold an armistice conference. Perry Knight, Lord of Earth."

He dropped the note, weighted with a stone, at the enemy's back lines, from a plane. It would be delivered to Elda. Perry could picture the flushed vexation that would come over her satanically beautiful face. What would she do, in the face of stalemate?

In the next week, enemy activity ceased utterly. Perry toyed with the idea of a surprise counter-attack, but thought better of it. Why waste men? If Elda stubbornly continued, then would be the time to gather masses of men and guns and crush her once and for all. Perhaps she would see her predicament.

"The green-eyed witch will not arbitrate," old Aran Deen predicted. He lifted his head, as though sniffing for trouble. "She has some new trick up her sleeve."

Perry's elation died.

He could feel it too, a brooding air of impending something. The quiet before the storm. Would she make one last, desperate assault, with her full army? He scouted in a plane and saw, along their supply route, huge wagons drawn by twenty horses. Nameless objects of ominous size, covered with canvas, were being dragged up to the front lines.

Perry had no chance to see more.

Three planes droned up to meet him. Their mounted guns peppered at him. When a bullet drilled through his windshield, past his ear, Perry boiled. He had seen the coppery flash of Elda's hair again, in one of the planes.

"Get on the tail of one of those ships," Perry barked to his co-pilot. He stuck his gun, taken along for emergency, through the cracked windshield grimly.

Chasing him away again, was she? Perry knew he was being mad, reckless, inviting an aerial battle—one against three. But the vision of her mocking smile in his mind had the same power to make him almost a maniac, as twice before.

Hounding the tail of one ship, Perry shot steadily. A bullet struck somewhere in the left wing motor. Smoke poured from it, then flame, and the plane dove down as a blazing firebrand.

One gone!

Shot at by the second plane, Perry himself slewed his ship away with a wrench that threatened to tear the wings off. Circling, he angled back, let the co-pilot take over, and aimed for the other ship's windshield. The gods again leaned his way, as a bullet sped through glass. The pilot killed or wounded, the plane flopped crazily. Half-way down it righted, perhaps under the hand of a co-pilot, and managed to land safely.

The second out of action!

Panting, Perry looked for the third ship—Elda's. It had hovered off, as though indolently watching. Perry roared at it, aiming with his gun. He had a perfect shot, at either the windshield or right wing motor.

His finger hesitated at the trigger. He groaned, involuntary thoughts booming in his mind. Starkly, he saw a vision of Elda's lithe body crumpling at the impact of a bullet. Or her ship crashing to flames out of which no living thing could emerge.

Twice before, with her death at his fingertips, he had felt this same stab within him, without quite knowing what it meant. Now he knew.

GRIMLY he shot, reviling the fate that had combined his most dangerous enemy with the thing he loved, against all rhyme or reason.

But too late.

In the split-second of his hesitation, Elda's plane slewed upward. Gracefully, it made a figure eight and came

at Perry's tail. Perry gasped. It had been a sheerly artistic maneuver, product of skilled 30th century flying. Elda had been a supreme aviatrix, in her former life.

Perry winced, waiting for the burst of flame from his rocket engine, as her bullets found their mark. But the burst of bullets only ripped into his fuselage tanks, emptying them rapidly. Perry turned for his own lines, expecting to be hounded, shot down. But Elda's plane soared high, dipped in a little mocking gesture, and turned away.

He could almost hear her say: "Finish defeating me. And winning me. You fight only for me!"

Perry landed with the last of his leaking fuel. He trembled now, in reaction to what had been his, and the world's, first dogfight in the air since a vanished time.

But he trembled for another reason. He was suddenly aware, belatedly, that the burst of bullets from her plane had been a drumming rat-tat-tat.

Like a machine-gun!

ATTACK came the next day.

Attack out of a nightmare. In stunning sequence, the ominous foreboding of the past week materialized. First came an air-raid. The planes roared up and down the first-line trenches, spraying metal death. Perry listened to the sound, and it was the same as from Elda's plane.

Machine-guns, they had those! Lar Tane was a step ahead. Perhaps for months back, even before the use of rifles, he had worked on the machine-gun, finally perfecting a useable one.

Before Perry could send up his planes, the enemy flight withdrew, having done significant damage. There was a slight lull, then a throaty thump that brought a dazed look to Perry's face.

It could only be the voice of a weapon absent from Earth for 2,000 years—a *cannon!*

Lar Tane was two steps ahead!

The first few charges furrowed into the ground ahead. The following arced into the trench, in blasts of flying metal pieces. Each took five or ten men, and caved in yards of trench. The cannon were obviously loaded with sharp grapeshot, blown out by steam. Not the mighty exploding shells of scientific war, but frightful enough in 50th century terms.

Perry saw decimation stalk his trenches. The men stuck to their posts bravely, inured now to long-range death, but replacements had to be rushed up constantly. And there was no enemy within range to shoot at, not even with the rifles. For hours the big guns bombarded, making a shambles of the front-line trench.

At noon, the enemy advanced, waves of rifle and sword corps.

Perry gasped again.

An apparition led the way across no-man's-land. A huge, shiny, rumbling machine, spitting machine-gun fire from its turret. A dozen of them were the spearheads of attack.

Tanks!

That was the word, from the dim past. They were steam-driven tanks, plucked from the annals of ancient war.

Perry's riflemen took what toll they could, and then the enemy swarmed into the trenches. More than swords flashed in the sunlight. Bayonets, too, at the ends of rifles. Perry's forces were driven from the front-line trench, after a last stand of furious hand-to-hand struggle.

Night brought its lull.

Aran Deen spoke with shock behind his phlegmatic tones.

"Machine-guns, cannon, bayonets,

tanks! Lar Tane has truly introduced scientific war. History has been given a huge jolt. What can we do now, Perry?"

"I don't know—I don't know!" Perry was sunk in a toneless lethargy. "Fight, I guess, to the last."

IN THE following week, Perry was hurled back daily from trench line to trench line. He could not stem the tide. With merciless precision, Elda, high priestess of war, used her new tools. The raiding planes sprayed machine-gun hail. The cannon bombarded viciously, cutting his lines to pieces. The tanks, like roaring demons, cleared the way for attack-troops.

Perry felt as though he had been switched to the past, to a raging war of the 20th century that his father had told of. His pitiful few guns and swords, arrows and spears were useless. He was a knight in armor before bullets—grim pun! Lar Tane was a science warlord raiding the helpless Stone Age world.

The handwriting was on the wall.

At the tenth day, unable to even dig trenches fast enough to keep up with those captured, Perry was driven into the open. His Mannerheim Line had been broken. He tried one desperate stand in the open. It was havoc, with the cannon, planes and tanks grinding forward inexorably.

In effect, Elda had a mechanized unit, deadly for blitzkrieg purposes. Her cannon were crude, her tanks small and undeveloped, her machine-guns quick to jam, but Perry had none. He could only retreat, almost at a run. Elda followed relentlessly.

Hounded to the Mediterranean, in the next two weeks, Perry dispersed his army. Europe was lost! He fled on a sailing vessel to Gibraltar, with his seasoned officers and Aran Deen. Here, in the next few days, he sabotaged the Gibraltar plant. Lar Tane would not be able to use it. He left the radio station intact. No need to wreck that.

Elda came with part of her army by sea, as Perry knew she would, rather than over the Pyrenees. She was determined to drive him off the continent. Perry sailed the day before her victorious troops reached Gibraltar, in the *Dogstar II*.

A scouting plane saw the ship, swooped, and sprayed the deck with machine-gun fire. In anticipation, Perry had called all men below. The plane gone, he came up to find a note that had bounced to the deck.

"To Perry, Lord of America, pro-tem. Eurasia is ours! You can't stop us in Africa. Nartica to the side, you're Lord now only of the Americas. I've taken more than half your world away. I'll take the rest too. I'm afraid you won't have an empire to win me with—unless you capitulate to my father before it's too late. Elda."

Perry slowly tore the paper to shreds and let them swirl down to the water. He looked back. Gibraltar was sinking below the horizon. Europe, Asia and Africa lost, yes. But it hurt him most to see the ruins of the Gibraltar plant, at his own hand. It was an ominous omen of the greater destruction settling over the world like a smothering cloak.

The ship plowed toward America, into a sunset that spread a blood-red glow over the bowl of sea and sky.

Another omen.

For now it was World War!

CHAPTER XXI

Threat of Science

WHEN Perry docked at New York City, he found America seething —and divided.

The American tribal-states, united behind Stirnye to bring a new social order, had remained a closely knit group, loyal to the idea of a democratic World-State—up till now.

Now, half the tribes cried against Perry. He had lost the European campaign, ignominiously. Gone down in their estimation. He was nothing of the leader Stirnye, his father, had been.

Perhaps Lar Tane, was the man to lead the world! The cry ran the length and breadth of the land.

It was a dangerous moment. Perry pondered the dark situation. He was still on the defensive. If Lar Tane struck soon, an invasion of American might succeed overnight, for lack of opposition.

On the third day of his return, a radio call came from the Gibraltar station. Lar Tane's voice rolled from the loudspeaker.

"We brought our own generator down from the Rhine plant, for power here at Gibraltar. Clever of you to sabotage the Gibraltar plant. But I've tripled the capacity of the Rhine plant. It will equip my army of conquest. I'm going to invade America!"

"If you expect me to capitulate—" began Perry fiercely.

"No, I suppose not." Tane seemed to sigh falsely. "My daughter, Elda, rather strangely helped you escape, to prolong the war. Perhaps she is right —that it's better to conquer all Earth by force of arms. A conquered people is easier to handle."

Perry writhed. So that had been her reasoning, behind all the fanciful talk of giving herself to a man who won her an empire. She had been coldly calculating all the while. Was she more of a monster than her father? Perry ground the image of her out of his mind. He must learn to hate her —hate her for what she was. A scheming woman who pursued her own ends, first, last and always.

"*If* you conquer them!" Perry shot back to Lar Tane.

"Still skeptical?" drawled Tane's voice. "You've had a taste of our 30th century methods. More will come." His voice turned ugly. "I warn you, Perry. I will strike—soon!"

HE DID. The next day, ten rocket planes swooped like striking eagles from the stratosphere, down over New York. They circled, dropping black objects. Hurtling down, these landed to explode with deafening reports.

Aerial bombing of cities! Lar Tane was reviving that frightful war method from the archives of past holocaust.

In the city, panic stalked the streets. Women and children screamed, running blindly about. Men shouted hoarsely, and shook their fists futilely in the sky. The bombers obviously had two objectives—the Capitol dome and the beehive of industry at the southern tip of Manhattan Island. But unskilled their lethal cargo dropped haphazardly.

One bomb did explode near the Capitol dome. The ship that dropped it had zoomed daringly low. Perry knew he would see the flash of coppery hair. Elda again! Raging, Perry ran for the airfield. But before he was half there, the enemy squadron left, their bombs gone.

It had been a quick, stunning blow, literally out of clear blue sky. Perry sniffed at the sulfurous fumes that wafted through the city. Simple potash and sulfur bombs. Not powerful, but easy to make, where guncotton or TNT would require elaborate chemical manipulation.

Later, the results of the bombing were checked. Three buildings shat-

tered. A factory plant slightly damaged. Five people killed, twenty wounded. That was all.

"A significant result!" Aran Deen muttered.

"Significant? Hardly anything." Perry went on broodingly. "But worse will come. Bigger bombs, better aim. With New York smashed, the center of civilization today, Lar Tane will easily sweep through an America that's divided against me."

Bitter despair clutched Perry.

Strangely, Aran Deen's old eyes glowed.

"A significant result, I say! I think Lar Tane made a mistake, this time. Divided America? Watch, Perry, as news of this spreads."

Perry saw what he meant.

The news of defenseless women and children bombed wailed across America. The wildfire of indignation swept back in a tidal wave. Overnight, almost, the atmosphere changed. Delegations began to come from all the inner tribes, from the Arctic to the Gulf, and from South America, pledging their continued fealty and aid to Perry, against the usurper Lar Tane. Against the cruel bomber of innocent women and children.

"He did make a mistake," Aran Deen chortled. "He should have remembered how many times in the past people solidified to bitter enmity when their cities were bombed."

PERRY took a deep breath, with vital support once more behind him. He pondered what was still a dark situation.

World War!

It was that now. With the manpower of Europe, Asia and Africa to draw from, Lar Tane had ballooned into a formidable power. The campaigns in Europe seemed almost like little skirmishes now, to Perry. Future battles would be stupendously greater, with much of the hell of scientific warfare unloosed.

And who would be able to strike a heavy blow first—Lar Tane at Perry, or Perry at Lar Tane?

Perry determined it must be himself. He must take the offensive again, invade Europe somehow.

His call to arms in America brought enthusiastic response now. Men marched from their homes and fields in droves, reporting at a recruiting center set up north of New York. Within a month, a million men had congregated, with more arriving daily. The seasoned officers from the European campaign organized and began training them.

Perry became a dynamo of activity, in his Manhattan laboratory.

With Aran Deen, and utilizing certain data in preserved records, he quickly devised a machine-gun, cannon, and tank. It was to be a war of science now, and large-scale destruction. Lar Tane had asked for it.

The completed model of the machine-gun was crude and clumsy, but fired twenty rounds a minute. Lar Tane's could not be much better. The cannon, like Lar Tane's, was really a mortar that shot forth heavy charges of grapeshot. The tank rattled and clanked as though ready to fall apart any moment, but its tough alloy parts held under any punishment of rough terrain. The steam-engine to drive it was modeled after the steam-turbine they already knew. Its "fuel," as with the *Dogstar II's* great engine, was simply a few lumps of the radioactive-wax releasing its stored atom-energies.

Perry was not amazed at his ability to devise these engines of warfare so swiftly. They were comparatively simple. For many years, with his father,

he had thought in terms of new invention. It had taken much more ingenuity to achieve radio transmission. But he was dismayed. With his father, he had devised useful, worthy things. Now his skill and mind fashioned these shuddery tools of Mars.

What horrors lay ahead?

IN THE meantime, Perry had gathered twenty-five planes for the defense of New York against the enemy sky raiders. But strangely, no second bombing raid came. Had the first been just a test, like the test of the first guns, in Europe? Was Lar Tane rapidly piling up a vast arsenal of bombs? Preparing for another Der Tag?

The suspense tore at Perry's nerves. One surprise after another. What ominous things was Lar Tane scheming, while two continents girded themselves for war?

He sent scouting planes to Europe. They reported vast activity at the Rhine plant, and at Vinna. Day and night shifts building, constructing. Wagon trains rattling back and forth across his territory. But nothing definite could be learned. It was all mysterious, sinister.

"Lar Tane is building up armament," Aran Deen summarized. "Preparing for a final showdown. When he attacks, it will be with the fury of seven hells."

"Yes, but I think we'll beat him to it," Perry allowed himself a calculated optimism. "We have two plants to his one, turning out armament. And we have Nartica. I haven't touched Nartican resources yet. Now I will. I'm sending down duplicates of our weapons. In a few months Nartica will turn out ten times what Lar Tane can produce. This is World War! I'll smash Lar Tane if it takes all the resources of America and Nartica!"

The plane left that would start the industrial machines of Nartica whining to turn out armament.

SOON after, the unexpected happened.

A second air-raid.

Perry promptly led his planes up. Twenty-five against the enemy's ten. Machine-guns against machine-guns this time. He smiled grimly. If they refused to leave, he could lose two to their one and still bring them all down. They would leave. Lar Tane had no more replacements for his ten confiscated planes.

But they didn't leave. Instead they spread, inviting a dogfight.

"Let 'em have it!" Perry shrieked, darting his ship forward.

His partner ship followed. Perry had given previous instructions for his ships to work in pairs, singling out an enemy. He swerved. He spied Elda's ship, with its large imperial emblem of golden swastikas.

A hollow, implacable voice said, within him: "This time, if you have the chance, do not fail!"

When Elda's ship looped upward, for position, Perry's partner ship looped with her. Perry barreled with a furious burst of his wing rockets and gained rearward vantage. Giving over to the co-pilot, he clutched the trigger of his machine-gun, ready to obey the demon voice whipping his mind.

But he never shot.

Something hellish happened.

He heard nothing, felt nothing, saw nothing. But he knew that *something* had leaped from the nose of Elda's ship. From a device with a strange flashing mirror. The mirror swung, as though focusing for Perry's partner ship.

Abruptly, with a soundless puff, the partner ship was a mass of fire. All

its alcohol fuel sheeted out in one tremendous flame. A second later its liquid-air supply exploded, blowing the burning ship to blazing debris.

No bullet, or even explosive shell, could have achieved that monstrous annihilation. And there had been no bullet or shell. It had been a silent, invisible force, projected by the queer mirror.

Perry knew the stunning answer.

The heat-ray!

Lar Tane had not been bluffing.

WITH a savage snarl, Perry went after Elda's plane. His bursts of machine-gun fire missed, as she maneuvered with swift, deadly grace. Suddenly she was after him, at his tail. Her mirror-device flashed.

Perry's scalp rose, as the air outside his cabin shimmered with heat-waves. He swerved, desperately. Three more times he poured bullets at her, always a split-second too late. And three more times she outmaneuvered him, and shot that diabolic heat-beam past him.

He had the feeling that she was playing with him, taunting him, trying to make him die a thousand deaths.

With swift glances around, Perry saw seven more of his planes burst into flaming fragments, raining below. All the enemy planes were equipped with the unbeatable heat-beam. The sky became a corner of hell. It was slaughter. Only one of Elda's planes plummeted below, from a lucky bullet.

Half sobbing in helpless rage, Perry dove, as the signal to leave. His squadron left the skies to the victors. Aran Deen hobbled up as Perry staggered from his cabin.

"The heat-ray!" the old seer shrilled. "In the 30th century, Lar Tane often sent squadrons to burn cities to ashes."

They watched. The city watched, awed, paralyzed, as the weapon that seemed truly magic was wielded. Even to Perry it was almost magic. His father's 20th century had known the heat-ray only as a wild dream.

Elda's planes spread in a line, slowing to their minimum cruising speed, underjets drumming steadily. Lowering to 500 feet, their mirrors flashed downward, sweeping the invisible infra-red rays along streets, buildings, people.

Perry shuddered. Towers melting, steel running like water, humans falling as blackened corpses, a whole city in instant flame. Was that what would happen?

CHAPTER XXII

Divided World

HE took a deep breath of relief.

Little was actually happening. Here and there a glass window cracked, overheated. A bit of dry debris smoked in a gutter. A rag smoldered. A puddle from recent rain steamed slightly. Steel and stone and solid wood remained adamant.

Where the scorching beams touched people, their clothing steamed, protecting them. Screams arose, more in fear than harm. It was like a withering blast, but not strong enough to more than flush the skin and bring sweat.

Perry gasped in relief again, as the last of the alcohol fuel in his planes drained out and they were hurriedly trundled away. When the heat-beams swept over the airfield, the puddles of fuel burned swiftly, harmlessly. The metal of the planes withstood easily.

After a few minutes of the aerial scourging, the enemy flight droned away, out over the ocean to Europe.

Aran Deen and Perry looked at one another, appalled at this threat of the future. A promised unleashing of hell-borne forces that in the 30th century

had set a world afire.

"Just a test," Aran Deen said. "Lar Tane's heat-ray isn't a city-burner—yet. It's only good against ignitable fuels, like alcohol in the planes. But give him another few months to develop it—"

His old frame shuddered.

"We won't give him the chance—we can't!" Perry drew himself up. "We haven't the heat-ray, but he has only ten planes. Nartica is now turning out our armament, for attack on Europe. Also, Nartica has hundreds of planes. With those we'll down his ten, by sheer weight of numbers. Then we'll bomb and machine-gun his troops and blast him wide open. I should have done this from the first—cracked down on him with all I had. Still, it's not too late. With Nartican resources, I've got the definite advantage—"

HE looked up, at a drone in the sky. Attack again? But it was a single ship and it came from the south, from distant Antarctica. It landed, and six blond Narticans strode forward from the cabin.

"Lord Plaronne!" Aran Deed said, surprised, greeting the governor of Nartica and his staff.

Tall and white-bearded, Lord Plaronne bowed stiffly.

"Lord Perry," he spoke in formal tones. "Yesterday your plane arrived in Nartica, with plans of weapons to be manufactured in quantity. Unfortunately, we cannot comply."

"What?" Perry was puzzled. "But you have machines, factories, skilled technicians—"

The Nartican shook his head.

"It's not that. Nartica declares neutrality!"

It was like a bomb bursting, with more shattering force than any of Lar Tane's.

"Neutrality!" gasped Perry. His voice rose sharply. "But how can you? Nartica is not a separate nation. I'm Lord of Earth—of all Earth except the present rebel territory. You have to help me put down the rebellion."

Lord Plaronne smiled faintly.

"Rebellion? Nartica considers them a rival state, since your defeat in Europe. Nartica declares its independence. We can have nothing to do with what is now World War."

Perry swayed, almost as though the world was cracking apart beneath his feet. And it was. Thunderstruck at this bewildering, ominous turn of events, he was hardly aware of Aran Deen screeching, waving his arms for emphasis.

"You declare independence! How long do you think you'll keep it? Without your help, America will fall before Lar Tane. Lar Tane will then conquer Nartica. He is seeking world rule. Twenty-five years ago, Stirnye sailed for Nartica and rescued it from decadence. Lar Tane's legions and fleets will come only to hammer you into submission. Think well, Lord Plaronne, before you invite utter subjugation."

Lord Plaronne's face was flint hard.

"Nartica can take care of itself. Besides, he—"

The Nartican stopped, as if having said too much.

Aran Deen peered cannily into his face.

"He—who? Did Lar Tane promise you safety? Through whom? Whom did he send down there? Tell me!"

"Lord Stuart," the Nartican said, reluctantly.

Aran Deen nodded.

"I thought so. Tell us one more thing, Lord Plaronne. Did Lar Tane ask for your help, perhaps at an attractive price?"

Lord Plaronne started, and flushed.

"Nartica declares strict neutrality," he said firmly. "We have decided that neither rule under a constitutional World-State, or under Lar Tane, is desirable. Fight out your war as you wish. Nartica will pursue its own destiny."

With that the delegation turned and left. Their plane droned off to the south.

"MY own people!" Aran Deen groaned. "My own people shirking their duty. Perry, this is serious. Lar Tane has opened a diplomatic front. And introduced his deadliest weapon—Machiavellian treaty-making. If Nartica swings toward him—"

Perry could already picture the great air fleet of Nartica, equipped with heat-rays, sweeping across helpless America. Her humming machines churning out armament for Lar Tane. It was starkly clear and simple now. Around Nartica—remnant of the science age—pivoted the outcome of this war of budding science.

"I'm going to Nartica," Perry said bleakly. "The war will be won or lost down there."

Aran Deen nodded soberly.

"I'm coming along. I have some influence yet, though I've lived in America for twenty-five years."

An hour later, leaving all affairs in the hands of trusted officers, they stepped to their plane. Perry was startled to find Leela following Aran Deen.

"Stuart is down there," the old seer said cryptically. "Lar Tane uses all weapons—including womanhood. We will, too."

It was not startling to Perry, as to his 20th century father, to find Antarctica as a bare, brown continent, with only a ring of ice around the actual South Pole.

By the 50th century, Earth had shaken itself entirely free of the last great Ice-Age. The Antarctic and Arctic both were not the forbidding, bitter wastes of snow and eternal ice of 3000 years before. Their average climate was no worse than Alaska had been.

Snugly underground were the ten great cities of Nartica, and its ten million blonde inhabitants. Feudal lords of Stone Age Earth they had been, foraging for slaves and food among the Tribers.

Stirnye had changed that. So decadent was Nartica that it offered no resistance, beyond one brief battle, to Stirnye's small force of "invasion." He had then preached world-wide brotherhood, true civilization. Now Nartica was shrinking back from that task, like a turtle ducking into its shell.

Their plane landed on the metal cap of Limerka—language relic of long-gone Little America. Home-city of Aran Deen, and Silva, Perry's mother. She had been queen here, once.

Perry drew a long breath, as an elevator took them below the metal roof into the warmed city. He had been here before. But each time he came, he felt the whispers of hoary history in his ears. Little America, holding of Stirnye's ancient United States. Limerka, city Silva, his mother, had ruled.

He, Perry, son of Stirnye and Silva, had by birth the right of rule here, a right stretching back across an age.

He shrugged these fancies out of his mind. More practically, he breathed the tangy air of bustle and activity. Machines hummed below. Coal and metals spun the things of civilization. So could all the outer world be, in time.

And greater. For Nartican industry and science were restricted, bound by their four walls. They had no railroads, radio, or even electricity. It was Per-

sia, sunk into slothful indolence. Only the younger generation, helping in the Triber world, had the new spirit of progress.

Queer interlude, in history. Civilization ready to spring forth, all over Earth, under the aegis of a central ruling power. Nartican youth and knowledge ready to spread. 20th century reinvention ready to add full momentum. The Magna Charta ready to pave the way sanely, peacefully.

And now, instead—war!

AS THEY stepped away from the elevator, a second cage came down from the landing roof. Perry started violently.

Elda Tane stepped out!

She started, too. They stared at each other. Involuntarily, Perry tensed, as though expecting a sword or gun to leap into her hand. She smiled mockingly, then.

"This is not the battle-field, Perry," she said easily. "This is *neutral* territory."

She had stressed the "neutral" maliciously.

"Yes—" Lord Plaronne's voice sounded behind them, as he hurried up. He seemed flustered, at this meeting of the two belligerent commanders. "While here in Nartica, please observe all ethics of neutrality. You are both unarmed?" He turned to the girl. "What is it you wish, Lady Elda?"

"I want to see Lord Stuart."

"We want to see him too," Aran Deen said quickly.

Elda flashed them a guarded look. She seemed to notice Leela for the first time, and the slumbrous green eyes narrowed.

"I see," she breathed. "This is to be a battle of wits."

Suddenly she laughed and took Leela's arm.

"Come, my dear! We'll see him together."

Pale and trembling, Leela drew back from the green-eyed goddess who had invaded her universe. Aran Deen seemed to make some secret sign to Leela. Stiffening, bringing a brave smile to her lips, she let Elda take her arm.

"You will all see him together," Lord Plaronne said diplomatically, leading the way to his first-level palace. He was a bit nervous over the delicate situation.

In an ornate chamber, they were ushered into the presence of Stuart. His eyes widened as he saw the four figures approaching.

Perry wondered what drama was about to be played at this pole of Earth. Battle of wits, yes, as Elda had said. And battle of human wills, emotions, souls. For somehow, Perry sensed, the threads of their lives and of a larger destiny were inextricably tangled together.

Out in the world cannon might roar, bombs burst. Down here, human wills would clash, tongues cut sharply, with results more far-reaching.

Elda pulled Leela directly before Stuart. He stared from the satanic beauty of Elda to the simple loveliness of the girl he had left a year before. For a moment naked remorse leaped into his eyes. Then his eyes turned, as to a magnet, back to the patrician features of Elda. He composed himself and greeted them all formally.

Elda smiled, as though having won an intangible victory. Then, like a general marshalling her attack with military precision, she pointed to Perry.

"I think your brother is here to give his usual plea—that you return to the fold."

Stuart avoided Perry's eyes.

"I don't think we have anything to discuss," Stuart said coldly.

NO, THEY hadn't. Perry could see that. Stuart was here as Lar Tane's representative, to solicit Nartican aid. Or at least to keep her neutral. For Stuart wanted his empire, with which to buy Elda. She still had him duped in that naive belief.

Perry said nothing.

Elda turned to Aran Deen.

"And you, old man. What have you to say to Stuart?"

One against three. Elda was flaunting her power over Stuart. Stuart could see it himself, and winced. But he had long ago given up fighting it.

Aran Deen's rheumy old eyes fastened on the sultry beauty speculatively.

"Nothing, nothing," he mumbled. "Except to ask him, and Lord Paronne, one thing. Do they know of the armed fleet of sailing vessels now approaching Nartica, ready to force her to aid Lar Tane, if she chooses otherwise?"

Everyone gasped.

Elda shot the old seer a startled glance, then turned to Lord Plaronne's stunned face.

"Of course, it isn't true! Ask Aran Deen if he has proof of such a wild conjecture."

"No, it was just a shot in the dark," Aran Deen admitted, guilelessly. "I thought you might try 30th century tactics."

Elda shot him another measured, almost worried glance, then spoke again to the Nartican governor.

"Now, to business. I'm here to make another offer, from my father, Lar Tane. If Lord Perry is here for similar reasons, I challenge him to make his offer openly."

Lord Plaronne made a shocked gesture.

"Nartica remains strictly neutral. I will listen to no so-called offers—"

Elda broke in blandly.

"Nonsense. Why hide behind a screen of false virtue? Our offer is this. Give us your aid to defeat America. Then, when my father forms his World Cabinet, and World Parliament, five members out of ten will be Narticans! Now ask Perry what his offer is."

"I have no offer," Perry said quietly. "Except as before. In my World-State, under the Magna Charta, Nartica will have just and proportional representation in the World Congress. Nothing more, nothing less."

"And freedom of thought," Aran Deen added pointedly, glancing at Elda. "In 2904, Lar Tane forbade the printing of books in the province of Scandia, a hotbed of liberalism."

Elda waved an airy hand.

"The masses must be held in hand by responsible leaders. You, Lord Plaronne, realize that. You're a level-headed man. Your Nartica held sway over the Tribers for centuries, before Stirnye interfered. Nartica, with my father, will rule again. It reduces to that."

Perry gasped.

It was sheer appeal to power-lust. No camouflage, no pulling of punches. He gasped again, at the expression in Lord Plaronne's face. Cupidity, avarice, and a haughty belief in Nartican superiority, and right to rule. She had spoken his language.

The Nartican governor glanced around guiltily, then stiffened. He spoke slowly.

"Our High Council will be in session for three days. We have not yet passed finally on Nartica's position. You will be my guests, for that time. You have the freedom of the city, but please refrain from trying to contact anyone in authority. We will make our own decision, as seems best to serve the interests of the world, and Nartica."

He signified dismissal.

Attendants came to lead them to separate quarters. In the hall, Elda's parting smile to Perry was taunting, self-assured.

CHAPTER XXIII

Battle Within

ARAN DEEN'S room adjoined Perry's. They ate together, in the former, from trays of food brought by silent servants.

The food choked Perry.

"It looks bad, old man. Nartica enjoyed world hegemony, and oligarchy, for a thousand years. My father broke it up. But now, after a brief twenty-five years, Nartica is ready to jump to its old position. Or at least co-rule with Lar Tane. Half a loaf is better than none."

"My own people," the old scholar muttered. "If only Lord Plaronne would send out scouting planes. I think my stab in the dark struck something. Lar Tane may have sent such a fleet. The green-eyed witch looked guilty, for an instant."

Perry hardly heard. Searching for a needle in a haystack, if the fleet existed, somewhere out in the broad oceans that lapped the shores of Antarctica from every direction. It was a hopeless hope.

Perry groaned, mentally oppressed. He had the feeling of a rat in a trap. Elda weaving a spell of evil, driving him into a corner.

"A stab in the dark!" Aran Deen suddenly hissed. "I have friends here. If the green-eyed witch were out of the way—"

Perry blinked. "What—"

"Assassination," the old seer said calmly.

"No!" Horror leaped into Perry's eyes. "Not that. Good God, not that. Old man, if you try it—"

He had clutched Aran Deen's bony arm fiercely. He relaxed, flushing.

The old eyes looked into his, accusingly.

"It has come to that, Perry! I merely tested you. But I can't blame you. Once, when I was young—" He shook his head. "You war on two fronts, poor lad."

"Yes, but she'll never win on that one," Perry snapped. "Old man, don't ever think she'll win that way."

Something else leaped into Aran Deen's eyes.

"War on two fronts! If she lost—"

PERRY was hardly aware that he was alone, then.

He flogged his mind to think—think some way out of the trap. See Stuart? Tell him how Elda was ready to cast him aside, for any other man with an "empire"? No, what good would that do? Stuart knew. He wanted to be the man. He was carrying on his fight solely for her, not for power or any belief in Lar Tane's ruthless principles.

Perry was suddenly aghast.

And what was he himself fighting for? Could he point a finger at Stuart—now? War on two fronts, yes. And on how many fronts could a man fight a battle? Could he fight within as well as without? Could he fight the battle for the world without first winning the one raging within him?

And yet—how could he win the one within? How, in the name of the universe! The roots of his inner war stretched back to mighty forces from the dawn of time. A man could as easily shoulder aside a world as steel himself against what Elda represented—as a woman.

The third knock penetrated his laboring mind. He opened the door, staring dumbly.

Elda Tane stood there.

"It is boring to sit, waiting, doing nothing," she smiled. "Will you join me, Herr Perry? Perhaps we can tour the city together. I am interested. You know more of it than I."

Her casual tone broke into a trilling laugh.

"Or would you consider it treason to your cause, to give me your company? I might win military secrets from you."

Perry glared at the challenge in her eyes.

"Come on," he said gruffly.

He could not let her think he quailed before her. He could not win the inner fight by hiding in the dark.

THE underground city was built around a huge central well that dropped sheerly. An elevator took them down a giddy mile, to the bedrock foundation. Level by level, they toured upward, through the beehive city and all its intricate ramifications.

An admiring wonder came over Elda's face, as though blown there by a breath from the past.

"This is almost like civilization of my time," she murmured. "Activity, industry, science in the service of man. Ah, Perry, you would have liked my times—"

"No," he said sullenly. "You had tyranny. Science prostituted in the enslavement of mankind. First there must be freedom, democracy, then the civilization of science. People, and human thought, are the important things. They must be free. Better a world of free people without science, than your kind with slaves."

"Your father said," she laughed.

"Yes, my father said," he snapped back. He went on, words tumbling out.

"My father saw the uprise of science war, and dictators, and oppression. It grew, for a thousand years. It fell apart, like a rotten apple, in your time. When my father awakened, after the Dark Age that resulted, he knew it must never happen again. Knew that civilization—his kind and your kind—had failed. Knew that—"

He broke off, bitterly.

"But of course you don't understand," he told her. "You were born, bred, and poured into a mold 2000 years ago. You just don't—can't, I guess—understand."

"Defending me, in your own thoughts?" Elda gave a rippling laugh, then sobered.

"But maybe I do understand. More than you think. After my father, I rule. I hate a dull world. I love excitement. And there is excitement in building, creating, fashioning a new world—"

"You?" Perry laughed scornfully. "You love war, and killing, and destruction. That's your man who doesn't exist—Death!"

"No, Perry." Her tones were strangely quiet, sincere. "You wrong me. I don't love death, nor do I hate it. One doesn't hate unless one fears. I accept the death I've wielded as a means to an end. I want you to understand that."

"Why?"

"Because I believe in what I'm doing. Because, no matter what you think of me, I've had my own convictions. I've been sorry for the lives sacrificed. Believe me. Even, at times, I've wondered—"

He waited, but she had fallen to silence. Her face was wistful, almost sad.

For the first time, Perry had a glimpse into her soul. Into a strange soul that was both dark and bright, compounded of things of the mind and things of the heart that were at vari-

ance. She was baffling, at times hateful. But always fascinating in a deadly way, and yet—somehow almost pitifully wistful. Is was as though behind a mask of superficial things she was fearfully earnest.

Perry held his breath, gazing into her soul. He wanted to see more. See what lay glinting softly at the very bottom.

"Elda, what do you mean?"

She turned the glory of her emerald eyes on him.

"I mean—"

HER voice ended in a sharp gasp. Abruptly, in a deserted passage they were traversing, a masked man leaped out silently. A knife glinted in his upraised hand. It swept down toward the throat of Elda Tane.

To Perry, the tableau seemed to freeze.

Aran Deen had done this, after all. Sent an assassin for Elda. Fleetingly, he noticed her face. There was no trace of fear there, only surprise. She had lived in a time of rampant death, all dread of it bred out. She stood like some tragic goddess, calmly accepting fate.

All this lanced through Perry's mind in split-seconds. He had leaped almost instantly to intercept the knife. But hopelessly.

The knife slashed at her slim white throat—and missed!

With a sob of relief, Perry caught the wrist, on its second deadly swing. He twisted viciously. The knife dropped. The masked assassin moaned, jerked free, and sped away like a ghoul. Perry sprang after him, but Elda clutched his arm.

"Never mind," she said briefly, her voice a trifle tight. "Let him go. I'll not be taken by surprise a second time. Aran Deen sent him. I see it now. He was the one who suggested I accompany you around the city!"

Perry cursed.

"I didn't think he would try it—"

Her green eyes smoldered on his, suspicion flaming. Then she shook her coppery tresses.

"You're not acting. You had nothing to do with it. Well"—she smiled faintly—"you saved my life. I was paralyzed. The second time he would have succeeded."

"Forget it," Perry grunted, conquering the sick horror within him. Unbidden, the picture came into his mind of Elda lying with blood flowing. He strode on, as though nothing had happened.

Following his cue, she spoke.

"Where was I? I was telling you that I believed in what I was doing—"

She broke off. The spell of that had been broken. She had closed her soul. Her voice changed.

"Perry, why did you save me—your worst enemy? In my time, men—well, gallantry was a lost thing. This kind. Why did you do it, Perry?"

He looked stonily ahead, refusing to say what she wanted him to. Refusing the bait of mockery.

"Gallantry, and other things," she mused, at his side, as they took an elevator up to the first level. "Honor, integrity, loyalty—but what am I saying? Those are the catch-words of a dream-world, which doesn't exist. *Your* kind of world. The kind of empire you'd give me, if you won. But it doesn't exist—couldn't. No more than the man exists who—"

SHE was peering at him, Perry knew. He steeled himself. She was using deliberate sincerity and earnestness as weapons. Luckily, he saw that now. He wouldn't yield a second time, as on the night of the escape at Vinna. She

was whiling away time, enjoying the battle on that hidden front between them.

"Where—"

He had suddenly noticed, in the hall of the palace, that she had taken his hand and was leading him to her rooms.

She urged him into a private lift.

"These were once the rooms of the Queen of Limerka, Lord Plaronne told me. Your mother. She liked to look out at the stars."

They stepped out in a hemispherical dome on the surface of the city's metal cap. A wide skylight let in the clear cold starlight of the polar firmament. Perry bit his lips. Was this sacrilege? Twenty-five years ago, in this same hushed chamber, his father and mother had pledged their love. Did she know?

She saw the question in his eyes.

"Yes, I know." Her voice was soft. "Look at me, Perry!"

In the star-glow, she was Diana, the moon goddess again. Coppery hair glinting like rare old patina, ivory skin aglow, emerald eyes sparkling—she was inhumanly, achingly lovely.

The battle began again, within.

Perry fought desperately, as guns pounded in tune with his pulse. She touched his hand and liquid fire raced through him.

The perfect lips formed words.

"Perry, tell me. Am I wrong? Is my father wrong? Is your kind of world the right kind? Is the kind of empire you would lay at my feet the one I really yearn for, deep inside?"

The questions were like a muted machine-gun.

He couldn't let her batter down his defenses again. Mockery! It must be there—but it wasn't.

"Elda!" His voice was hoarse, strained. "Elda, don't. It isn't fair."

"Are you the man who doesn't exist?" she said slowly, deliberately.

He shrugged, by sheer will-power.

"Why ask me? I—"

"You *are* the man who doesn't exist! Perry, come to me—"

He swayed, as an invisible wind beat down his last resistance. Eagerness flamed in his eyes.

"This time you mean it, Elda!" he croaked. "This time—"

Her lips were hot fire against his. Her lithe body yielded, and the flaming desire and wonder and sweetness of her blazed like a comet across Perry's universe. . . .

And then burst!

For the green eyes laughed—laughed into his.

He thrust her away, brutally.

"Witch of hell!" he moaned.

"That for casting me aside, once," she exulted. "Twice I've made you pay. And that, too, to keep you fighting—for me. I'll take your kind of empire, if you win. You still fight against me—and for me!"

Perry fled, as the other time. Fled from her trilling laugh of womanly triumph. Twice she had made a fool of him.

ARAN DEEN waited in his room. He looked up searchingly, wincing a little at the rage in Perry's face.

"You sent that assassin, old man? You utter, stupid, meddling old fool!"

"Assassin?" Aran Deen chuckled a little. "The man had his orders, to make it *look* good. Counter-attack, in your little private war with the green-eyed witch. Women often see men in a new light, when they 'save' their lives. Didn't it work, Perry?"

"Work! Work!" Perry groaned in utter misery. He ground the episode from his mind. "Any news from the council?"

The old seer shook his head, worriedly.

"Nothing official. Through friends, however, I hear they are debating furiously. And Perry—the *best* we can hope for is Nartican neutrality!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Lost Cause

PERRY was not too surprised, the next morning, when Elda again appeared at his door.

"Let's look over Nartican machinery and factories," she said blandly. "Estimate how fast they can turn out armament. Whichever way Nartica goes, we both need to know. Coming?"

She might be a family friend, suggesting a little outing in the country, by her casual tone. She made no mention of the previous day.

Perry nodded grimly.

Spending long hours in the levels that hummed with machines and spinning lathes, they both saw how rapidly the weapons of science warfare could be churned out.

"With Nartica lies the balance of power," Perry said frankly, since the girl must know too.

Elda shook her coppery head.

"Not quite—"

She went on, after a thoughtful pause. "I'll tell you something, Perry. Nartica neutral, or on our side, means quick victory for us. We have the heat-ray. But even with Nartica behind you—if that happened—you wouldn't win!"

"Wishful-thinking," Perry snorted. "Bluff."

"No." The girl was earnest. "Against Nartica turning your way, my father is turning out thousands of heat-ray guns. Improved ones. They are being installed along every mile of our Maginot frontier. The beams will cover every inch, with a mile range to each. Your troops could never break through. Not in years and years. And when the heat-ray is further developed, we'll sweep out, conquering."

She grinned in his face, like a lovely evil flower.

"You can't win the war. Or me!"

Perry shrugged.

"Wars are won by fighting, not talking."

But within, he was appalled. The damnable heat-beams encircling 'Lar Tane, protecting him in a ring of fire. Vinna protected similarly, against air-raids. Not all the armies of Earth would break through. Somehow, Perry believed her. But why had she told him? Out of sheer, malicious spite! To make his unrestful nights still more hideous.

LATER, wandering, they viewed ancient relics in Limerka's museums.

Pottery from 4000 A.D., made by backward folk of the Second Dark Age. Instruments of torture from barbaric 3400 A.D., when mankind had reached an ebb close to utter savagery, after civilization's collapse.

Wheeled sky-cars from Elda's time, in a sudden plunge back to the science age.

"Combination plane and auto," she murmured reminiscently. "Once, in one of those, I set a round-the-world record of 23 hours, broken a year later. Ah, Perry, my times were great—"

She peered into his stony face.

"Don't say it," she mocked softly. "My times were a veneer of civilization over jungle law. Mechanical Elysium around a framework of social purgatory. You see, Perry, I know, too. When I rule, I'll do better."

"Power is your god," Perry snapped shortly.

She seemed about to answer, but sighed and turned away.

They passed glass cases filled with resurrected relics of the long science age from 1800 to 3000. Parts of huge machines, labeled vaguely, for records of their use were lost. Metal-paged books from 2500, when they had been introduced. Half-smashed delicate microscopes that had peered into the heart of matter. A cracked telescope mirror, fifty feet across, reputed to have observed planets around the star Sirius. Slabs of transparent steel, a secret lost in antiquity.

Pathetic fossils of the supreme period when the human mind had searched for all the universe's secret. By 2800, man had understood most manifestations of the cosmos—excepting himself.

But mainly, the relics of 2800 to 3000 were the engines of war. Little hand-guns that shot poisoned needles. Cracked bombs once containing deadly germs. A giant, rust-eaten cannon barrel from 2600, whose legend claimed that the mammoth gun had shot ten-ton shells five hundred miles. It had been used to bombard half of Europe from the north coast of Africa, across the Mediterranean. A stratosphere torpedo, which in 2300 had rocketed from Asia to America, landed precisely in the heart of a city, and would have blown down a square mile of buildings, like its mates, if it hadn't been a dud.

Perry shuddered.

Mad orgy of scientific death-dealing. In comparison, the present war with its little guns faded to little more than a Stone Age battle touched up slightly.

"You think our trifling scuffle a war?" laughed Elda, sensing his thoughts. "You should have seen the drive on New York, in 2904. Two million bombers attacking daily for six weeks!"

She shuddered herself.

"Even the heat-ray we have is a toy. But it represents the most powerful weapon today. It will win for us. And—"

SHE stopped, stiffening.

Perry stared at the largest thing they had seen yet. It filled one end of the huge museum, on a pedestal of stone. The legend said:

"Fighting boat of the 20th century, destroyer class, 2500 tons, twelve six-inch guns. Found remarkably preserved, frozen solid in an iceberg. Was undoubtedly sole survivor of Antarctica Naval Battle of 1986, between fleets of Pan-Europe and Pan-America. Engines disabled, the crew died, and the winter freeze caked the ship in ice that remained for almost 3000 years."

A torn yellow piece of paper, pasted carefully on glass, was still legible, from the original log. It read, in 20th century script that Perry knew:

"Destroyer *Chicago*. January 1, 1986, New Year's. Enemy action disabled engines. Drifting south. Weather freezing. Food supplies low. No hope for us."

The log-writer had gone on, breaking from formal recording:

"But our fleet fights on. If it wins, Pan-America wins, and there will be no more war—ever! Pray God the New Year brings that!"

"He couldn't know," Elda murmured, herself subdued, "that there would follow a thousand years of war, off and on." She shook herself free from the incubus of that lost wail out of the past. "Remarkably well-preserved, isn't it?"

Locked away from corroding air and water within dry, sub-zero ice, time had passed the ship by. Its armored sides and deck were almost shiny. The guns were unrusted, seemingly ready to belch flame as of yore. At the rear an enemy shell had cracked through the deck, exploded below, wrecking the engine.

"It is," agreed Perry. "My father took me through the ship once. It has an arsenal of unused shells. If its engine were replaced—"

He started, realizing to whom he was talking. Their eyes locked a moment.

Perry turned on his heel.

"Let's go. Time for dinner."

They separated at the palace. Aran Deen met Perry with a worried face.

"The Council will vote tomorrow," the old seer mumbled.

"How much chance have we?" Perry demanded.

"For Nartican help?" Aran Deen shook his head. "None. Just a chance for neutrality. Slim chance."

Perry groaned. The suspense of it was driving him mad. And had Elda guessed what he had thought, looking at the great fighting ship of ancient days?

Aran Deen touched his arm.

"I spoke to Stuart today, bringing Leela along. Stuart lives in hell. I did not say much. He is beyond the appeal of words. But tomorrow—" His old eyes narrowed. "Something may yet be done."

"You can't break her spell," Perry ground out. "You simply can't."

THE next day, Aran Deen, mysteriously evasive, led Perry and Leela from their palace rooms to the elevators. Perry's eyes widened, as he saw Stuart and Elda awaiting them.

Aran Deen addressed them collectively.

"Lord Plaronne has graciously invited us to attend a play. I think it will ease all our nerves."

He looked around, as if for assent.

Elda Tane shrugged.

"Why not? Come, my dear."

Linking her arm in Leela's again, she entered the cage. Staring coolly at each other, Perry and Stuart followed. Aran Deen came last, with a studied air of nonchalance.

His plan was utterly transparent. Perry silently cursed him for a fool, playing a game that Elda was past-master in. Perry's mind translated it into war terms. Aran Deen battering away at Stuart's defenses with Leela. Elda standing between like a Maginot Line. And like a witch who had cast an evil spell over the heart and soul of Stuart. And Perry!

And what if Stuart turned from Elda now? What good was that, at this late hour? The Nartican war-council dealt with the realities of world diplomacy, not the personal undercurrents of four humans.

Descending to the fifth level, the playground of the city, they were ushered into an open amphitheatre. There was no rain in sealed-off Limerka. A crowd of five thousand Narticans stared at them curiously, whispering among themselves. It was strange to see the leaders of a world war sitting together. Not less strange than Alexander with Xerxes. Or Hitler with Churchill.

The play was frothy, typical of a decadent culture. Overly gallant men and faithless women pursuing desire in a squirrel-cage of intrigue. One of the songs was queerly in contrast with the shoddiness of it, sung by a troubadour to a lady-love on a balcony. Romeo and Juliet, flinging back the curtain of time.

"I walk in the towers,
They call me the King!
But what says my heart?
Of love does it sing!

I rule all the regions,
I bow down to none;
Yet triumph is empty,
If love isn't won.

This crown and this sceptre,
I wear them and sigh;
My love I'll find somewhere
Before I must die!"

"How strange!" Elda murmured, at

Perry's side. "That song is from my time—" Her whisper trailed off into a sigh.

The play went on. Perry sat woodenly. This was all meaningless, farcical. Stuart and Leela sat stiffly, eyes straight ahead. Elda flicked her eyes amusedly from one to the other. Then at Perry, mockingly.

Aran Deen sat with fading expectancy. When the play finally wore to a falsely tragic conclusion, he shrugged.

"The green-eyed witch's spell holds," he whispered to Perry. "Well, nothing has been lost."

THEY filed silently to the elevator, taking a cage upward. They stepped out on the metal bridge over the elevator-well, separated from giddy depths by a low rail. Perry shuddered. The Narticans were used to this immense pit, but it always struck him with an icy chill.

"Enough of this!" Elda snapped suddenly, facing them on the metal ramp. "I like my battles in the open, Aran Deen!"

She turned to Stuart.

"Whom do you want, Stuart. Leela or me? Tell them!"

Stuart's drawn face paled. His eyes went to Leela, then like a magnet to the green-eyed girl, in answer.

"You see?" Elda breathed triumphantly. "I win, in that. I win Nartica, too. Isn't that true, Aran Deen? I don't fear you and all your underhand doings—*Oh!*"

She gasped sharply and clutched with her hands in the same instant.

Standing nearest to her, Leela had fainted, swaying over the rail, over the teetering edge of the metal ramp. Elda's hand caught the sleeve of Leela's gown. It ripped. Leela's limp figure toppled into the yawning chasm that dropped for a mile.

Horror-struck, the group stood frozen, not daring to look below. No one had had a chance to save the girl. Elda's face was shocked, for her bland, cruel words had caused Leela to faint.

Perry broke from their trance and leaped to the edge.

"She's still there!" his voice burst out.

Leela's flowing gown had miraculously caught against a cage-stay of one of the long steel cables, twenty feet down. She hung there like a rag doll, dangling. Her gown ripped slightly, and further threads slowly parted under the strain of her weight.

"Perry!" It was almost a scream from Elda. "Perry—no—"

Perry felt the tug of Elda's hand on his arm, but finished his leap—over the low rail and out. His body flew through the air. Ten feet beyond the ramp he caught the cable with his hands.

Arms nearly jerked from their sockets, he clung for an instant, then lowered hand over hand. He reached under Leela's right arm just as the cloth of her gown ripped completely. The sudden load came close to tearing him away. But he held her, grimly.

Resting a moment, Perry tightened his legs around the cable till his calf muscles cracked. He grabbed Leela with both arms and raised her to his chest. The effort tore a sob from his throat. He held her.

It was not so bad then—for a while.

One arm around the girl, one hand clutching the cable, he felt himself slowly slipping. The wire-twists of the cable burned his palm. His legs turned to numb lengths of rubber. He hung there while eternities clicked by.

Fleetingly, he estimated how long it would take their two bodies to plummet down a mile. Why didn't help come? He tried to look around, but

everything was obscured in a red haze that hung before his tortured mind and body.

HANDS were suddenly touching him. Leela was lifted away. It was like the release of a world he had supported on his aching shoulders since time began. He was dimly aware of men shouting, telling him to unwind his legs. That he wouldn't fall; they had him.

Perry's mind snapped out of its fog. His body one throbbing ache, his abraised palms bloody, his legs trembling, he was in a cage-lift. It had come up below them, taken them through a roof trap-door. Several Narticans carried Leela out, and supported Perry as he stepped back on the metal bridge.

"Are you all right?" Aran Deen was gripping his arm.

Perry nodded, then started.

Stuart knelt beside Leela, rubbing her wrists. The look on his face was little short of frantic.

Perry glanced at Elda. How would she take that? Elda's face was pale, her green eyes dulled. Her slim hands clutched one another as though she had stood that way, frozen, all through the episode. It was the first time her composure had been so utterly shattered.

But why? Perry's mind staggered a little. Why was she looking at *him!* And looking at him as though seeing a ghost? Had the thought of one or two mere deaths so shaken her? Could this be the same Elda who, on the battlefield, watched men die indifferently?

Then Perry understood. She knew what it meant. She knew that an accident had done what Aran Deen's elaborate planning had failed against. That Stuart and Leela—

Leela's eyes opened, at last. Swift terror faded to relief as she saw Stuart's face, not a bottomless cavern. With a little sob, she flung her arms around him.

Stuart responded. Then he picked her up in his arm. His face turned slowly toward Elda, with a cold glance that spoke volumes.

Perry caught his breath. What fulminations, compounded by fate, were about to explode?

It was curiously undramatic.

About to speak, Stuart stopped as Leela's fingers touched his lips. Her eyes were shining. She turned to Elda.

"I don't blame Stuart—or you. It's over, now. You can't be bad, as I wanted to believe. There must be something in you he loved for a while—something fine."

Then, flushing girlishly, she nestled in Stuart's arms. He strode swiftly away, to put her in the hands of doctors.

Elda stared after them, her emerald eyes wide. Her face was a study of almost stupid incredulity. The words —"something in you he loved, something fine"—seemed to reverberate in the air. A scarlet flush washed beneath her ivory skin.

Then she straightened, almost with an audible snap of her spine. Her composure came back, as though she had whipped it about her like a cloak. She shrugged.

"So I've lost, in that," she said coolly. "No matter. I still win Nartica. You can have your Stuart. In an hour the war-council will announce that Nartica joins Lar Tane against America."

With a haughty smile, she left.

"I'm afraid she's right," Aran Deen muttered, as he and Perry went to their rooms. His eyes lighted. "Unless Stuart—"

He darted away.

"Get out!" Perry yelled at the Nartican doctor who came to treat his hands.

He wanted to be alone. All the previous episode faded from his mind. Stuart had at last broken from Elda's evil spell. Brother once again united with brother, in aim. But at this eleventh hour, what did it matter?

In a little while Nartica would announce itself an ally to Lar Tane. Soon after, the thunders of war would come to life, engulfing a world. Lar Tane would win. The last flickering hope went out.

Perry held his head as though he had been pounding it against a stone wall.

CHAPTER XXV

Won or Lost?

HE SNARLED suddenly, and ran from his room.

Grinning evilly, he sought Elda in her rooms. He would have a last moment of revenge, taunt her as she had taunted him. Remind her that all her hellish charms and wiles had finally lost, against Stuart and the love she had torn him from for a while.

Elda wasn't in her rooms. Raging, Perry took the private lift to the star-chamber above. She would be there, plotting and scheming the future hell-war about to be launched.

He flung open the door.

Elda stood with head lifted, looking up at the blazing polar firmament. She whirled, gasping, as though caught off guard. For a wink of time again, face flushed, hands squeezed together helplessly, her composure was gone.

Then, instantly, she smiled calmly.

"I thought you might come," she said mockingly. The moth to the flame."

"But one moth got away!"

Her hands went daintily to her ears.

"Don't shout. I hear you. Yes, Stuart did. But you, Perry—can't resist the flame. You burn for me!"

Perry stood dumbly.

What had he meant to say? What torrid words that would shame her, make her cringe, gasp, fly at him while he would laugh? They were gone now, the words. His mind was blank. He only knew that she was beauty incarnate, and flaming desire.

He stood dumbly.

"Listen to me, Perry." She was suddenly serious, earnest again. "My father will win, with Nartica. Why carry on a bitter war, needlessly? I've had enough of it. Too much of it in my time. Join us now, before it's too late. Come to me! After my father is gone, we rule together, you and I—"

"No." Perry was suddenly quiet, too. "Listen, Elda. There is only one way—my way. That's the only one thing I'm sure of. You must see it yourself. The Magna Charta adopted, forbidding rule by one person, or one group, through might. I wouldn't trust myself to rule. With you or without you. Don't you see—can't you see?"

"I see!" she breathed suddenly. "I see that you are human—and a man!"

She took a step forward, face oddly alight.

"But what if I told you I loved you? What if I told you that!"

"No tricks," Perry said wearily.

"Trick? What if I *meant* it, just realized it! Standing there on the metal ramp, watching you dangle, slip—"

She was advancing slowly.

Perry wanted to back away, flee. He had been burned twice, listening to the worthless words with which she played her woman's game. He tried to grip himself, lest he play the fool for the third time.

But his mind was a burning blank.

And in another moment, he had taken her in his arms, babbling. And in the next moment had ended up with the

swordcut of mockery. For there it gleamed from her eyes.

"Again!" Elda shrugged wildly. "You're my slave. This makes up for Stuart—"

THE door swung open abruptly.

Aran Deen entered. He stared from one to the other. His old frame was strangely upright. He fastened his canny eyes on Elda, and slowly she paled. Perry's pulses thundered, more violently than a moment before, when he had thought of striking the girl.

Aran Deen came with the council's decision!

The world seemed to hold its breath.

"The council has voted," the old seer said. "Nartica declares war on Lar Tane!"

Each word burst like a bomb in the still room.

"You lie," Elda panted. "You lie, old man!"

He glared at her, and grinned toothlessly. Craftily.

"Listen. I saw Stuart, after he had brought Leela to a doctor. He told me of the war-fleet hidden in a harbor, as I once guessed—"

"What!" Elda half shrieked. "But he didn't know of it—"

Instantly, she caught her breath, paling again. Her eyes wished that she could bite her tongue out.

Aran Deen yelped in pure joy.

"Do you hear?" he screamed to three Nartican men who now appeared beside the door. "Do you hear?"

They nodded soberly. By their uniforms, they were officials of Limerka.

Aran Deen turned back to the thunderstruck girl.

"We'll report now—to the Council! They have not made their final vote!"

He prodded the men away.

Perry and Elda were alone again.

"Tricked!" Gasped Elda, sinking into a cushioned chair. "Tricked like a little child."

Perry stood stunned. He heard the sudden drone of planes taking off, outside. Dozens of them. If the secret fleet were found—

He looked at Elda, and almost pitied her. She sat in a blind misery, hardly aware of his presence. He said nothing. Overhead, the polar stars blinked down, as though bewildered themselves at the swift turn of events.

Aran Deen was back again, in an hour.

This time his wild joy was genuine.

"We went to Lord Plaronne," he recited in bubbling delight. "He sent out a fleet of scout planes. They found your war fleet, in the harbor within thrust of Limerka. The council, at that news, instantly voted for us. All Nartica is aroused, crying against Lar Tane, realizing that after America he would conquer Nartica, not give it corule. These are my people. I've saved them. I used trickery, as you would have. And you lose, green-eyed witch!"

"We win, anyway," Elda contradicted. She had somehow pulled herself together. "There are a thousand ships, a million men. Nartica is unarmed. We'll conquer Nartica now, America after. Merely a change of plan."

"*Less* than a thousand ships now, Elda," shot back Aran Deen. "And less each minute. The Nartican planes are dropping bombs. It seems that Nartica secretly made them in the last few months, alarmed over the world situation, trusting no one. Two hundred Nartican planes are even now bombarding. Your fleet will burn to the water's edge in twenty-four hours!"

"Nartica already armed!" gasped Elda, utterly shocked this time.

Aran Deen gloated for a moment, then turned for the door.

"In accordance with neutrality ethics, Lord Plaronne gives you one hour to leave Nartica. If you are found here after that time, you are a prisoner of war."

PERRY stood dizzied from the leap out of black despair to the heights of hope. Striving to leave all triumphant inflection from his voice, he motioned toward the seal-door that let out on the city's metal cap.

"Your plane is out there," he said.

Shock changed to satanic rage, in Elda's face. She reached within the folds of her gown. A short sword leaped into her hands from a hidden scabbard.

"I carried this after the assassination attempt." She brought the sharp point up. Her voice was deadly.

"I'm going to kill you, Perry; Without you, the attack against us in Europe will be leaderless. Besides, that destroyer. I know what went on in your mind. You would use it. Without that against us, we'll hold off attack, as I told you."

Perry's scalp prickled, as she came forward with the deadly blade. No use to call for help. The walls were thick. No use to leap at her—not Elda. She was as quick as any man. In her coldly analytical mind, it was necessary to kill him.

There was no escape.

"Three times before I had the chance to kill you, and didn't," she said swiftly. "At Vinna, when you were prisoner. In the first aerial dogfight. And with the heatbeam over New York. I spared you each time, as a gamble, and whim. Now I can't gamble. This time you die!"

Her arm brought up the sword, for a quick thrust at his heart. Face flint-hard, eyes smoldering green, she was ready to kill as cold-bloodedly as though he were a wild animal.

But she hesitated.

"Why don't you say something?" she cried.

Cold and sick, Perry shook his head wordlessly. What was there to say?

Her fingers tightened on the hilt. Her body tensed again for the thrust.

Again it did not come.

Her eyes were wide.

And the sword suddenly slipped from nerveless fingers. The green eyes widened still more. For a long moment she stared at him, as though she had never seen him before.

"I can't," she whispered. "Do you hear, Perry? I can't! What does it mean? *What does it mean!*"

She was like a little, puzzled child, asking a question. Her voice seemed to rustle through every atom around them, and out through the universe, asking that question. And as if some inner lightning had struck from the unknown, Elda trembled—reeled.

Her awed whisper filled the starlit chamber.

"It means — it means — *you're the man who doesn't exist!*"

WITH two little, stumbling steps she threw her arms around Perry. She clung to him, burning him with the fire of her lips. She wasn't Elda, battle-queen, green-eyed witch who mocked. She was a girl, a woman, trembling against him.

"Dearest!" she murmured, babbled. "I should have known, today, at the elevator. It wasn't because of Stuart turning to Leela that I was pale, shaken. But because of you, and your danger! All the while that you hung there, slipping, slipping—oh, it was horrible! I nearly died. I burn for you, Perry!"

Her voice trailed away. Startled, she peered at him. He hadn't responded.

"You must believe me," she cried. "I swear it, this time. Look into my eyes. Can't you see? This time I mean it, Perry. This time it's I who come to you—"

Wild elation rocked Perry, filled him with a towering joy. The glowing light in her lustrous green eyes was meant for him. And there was no mockery, no trace of it.

She was his—his!

He caught her in his arms. Time ceased.

Then, with a groan, he pushed her away.

She fought to stay.

"You don't believe me? I swear it, I swear it. You must believe me—"

She was near to babbling.

"I believe you," Perry said in a strained, hollow voice.

"Then—"

She drew back, falteringly.

"I believe in your world, Perry—if that's what you want. I swear that too. I lay awake nights, thinking, wondering. But always stubborn. Now I know your way is the right way. Perry, dearest—"

But he stood silent, stricken. The foundations of the universe slowly cracked beneath them.

"I think I know!" Elda's voice was low, defeated. "What have I done? What horrible things? Plunged the world into war. Killed, lied, cheated, schemed. All because the world didn't give me a man I could love. Now—is it too late, Perry?"

He nodded haggardly.

"If you stay, as a prisoner of war, you'll be executed. If you go, and I win later—the same. God, it's too late, Elda. You've earned your death a thousand times."

She stared at him wordlessly, and the witchery of her in the starglow drove him mad. She was his, as a woman. But as Elda, enemy commander, he had only one duty, in the eyes of all Earth and all history. He had won—and lost.

The maddening paradox of it ground his nerves to shreds. He laughed wildly, half a madman.

"Go and finish your fight, as you told me so often! That's all that's left for us. Now it's you who will fight against me—and for me! Your every thought will be of me, as mine was of you. Take your own medicine, Elda. Get out—get out."

His savage shouts died away.

Elda's green eyes glistened. Tears in her eyes, the first he had seen—or thought possible. She was the true Elda standing there, a young tender girl, stripped of all the mask of her tumultuous 30th century start in life. The Elda that Stuart must have loved hopelessly.

But abruptly, she changed.

The head lifted, imperiously. The eyes green fire. The perfect lips thinned and formed words. She was Elda, battle-queen again. She spoke in tones bitter cold.

"All right, Perry. I'll go. I'll finish the fight. And I promise you it will be a good fight. I'll smash the world if I can! I'll kill, kill—"

Green hell glittered in her eyes.

She jerked open the outer door, flashed him one look of fury, and left.

Perry watched her reach her plane. The Nartican guards waved her on. Her ship rocketed up and vanished among the stars.

She was gone. Gone forever.

Perry reviled the fate that kept them apart. He turned away, haunted by her vision. The vision of her tear-wet face, as he had last seen it. The Elda he loved, but who didn't exist, except as one of a hundred poses behind a lovely mask.

She would continue the war, fight to the last. That was the real Elda.

CHAPTER XXVI

Blitzkrieg!

PERRY listened, as a thunderous drone filled the air. A hundred Nartican planes, hastily loaded with bombs, soared up to join the battle against Lar Tane's secret sea fleet.

Perry took a deep breath, sweeping Elda from his mind.

The roaring eagles meant victory in the war. They and the destroyer. He must work thoroughly this time, not hastily. His next attack on Lar Tane's stronghold must be with full, devastating preparation for a world-shaking blow.

With the drums of war in his pulse, he raced below.

He found Aran Deen with Lord Plaronne and the councillors.

"Elda is gone," Perry announced briefly. "Now, begin turning out guns, tanks, bombs, bayonets. Every machine in Nartica must be used, an army raised. We'll arm five million men before we attack."

Aran Deen spoke gravely.

"We've been discussing the situation. Frankly, we need a new war plan. Some of those sea-vessels have the heat-ray, and already they've brought down dozens of our planes. We'll down the fleet, since they left Europe a month ago, before the heat-ray was well-developed. But cracking the Maginot Line in Europe, studded with powerful heat-ray guns, is going to be another story."

"Yes, we need another war plan. And I have it." Perry went on eagerly. "That ancient fighting boat, in your museum, Lord Plaronne. I conscript it in the war."

"But it has no engine," Aran Deen cried. "It is a bigger, heavier boat than any known today. There is no engine in the world big enough to drive it."

"You forget the engine in the *Dogstar II*," Perry reminded. "I'm sending for it immediately. When we're ready, the destroyer *Chicago* will lead our fleet to attack. That, in conjunction with our air-fleet—"

Stuart stood at the side, trembling, eager. Perry looked at him.

"I appoint you commander of the air-fleet, Stuart," he said "O.K.?"

"O.K.!" Stuart cried back.

They smiled at each other. As boys, they had used that 20th century term, learned from their father.

SIX months later, the skies looked down on what was yet a Stone Age world, and saw an amazing thing.

Long, sleek and deadly, a strange craft led the way from Antarctica. An armored fighting ship of yore, whose like had not sailed the seas for 20 centuries. It was one of the smallest of ancient warships. It would have been a cockleshell beside one of the colossal dreadnaughts of the 30th century.

But in the 50th century, it loomed as the mightiest and deadliest war-machine in existence.

Like a ghost from the past, the destroyer *Chicago* led the way for a fleet of windjammers, its engine idling, cutting the waves with its sharp steel prow.

Perry stood at the bridge of the *USS Chicago*, exulting in the feel of power. Beneath the deck sounded the rumble of his Dogstar engine, whirling a huge four-bladed propeller. Nartican technicians had installed the engine. They had also refilled the ancient shells with fresh explosive, to replace powder deteriorated through 3000 years. Leaving Nartica, a test salvo from the guns had ripped apart the Stone Age air.

The *Chicago*—named after a city

that had long ago ceased to exist—was ready after 30 centuries to resume its deathdealing work.

"Strange," Aran Deen mused, as though he stood in some higher dimension and looked down over two ages. "In 1986 this ship and its fleet lost against European forces. Today, in 5000, destiny resurrects it for a second try. Forty-five superdreadnaughts failed in that past war. Will one little destroyer win, this time?"

There was reason for doubt.

"Elda knows, of course," Perry said soberly. "If she's thought of some defense—mines, steel nets—it won't. Then the war will grind on, maybe for years, till we crack through by sheer force—if we do."

"The green-eyed witch—" Aran Deen began, and then coughed at the pain in Perry's eyes. "I mean Elda—she will fight to the last."

"So will I," Perry said, with another meaning.

PERRY had organized his tremendous assault on Europe carefully.

The Nartican fleet waited at the Azores. A week later it was joined by the American fleet. Altogether 5,000 ships, five million men. A million were armed with steam-rifles. Scores of tanks and cannon lay in the holds. A total armament that in the 20th or 30th centuries would have been laughed at. But in the 50th, it rated as a formidable war-machine.

When all was ready, the armada sailed en masse for the coast of ancient France. As Perry expected, no resistance met them here. Lar Tane had strategically withdrawn into his Maginot shell. One-third of Perry's troops disembarked in France, ready to march.

A plane launched to America brought back five hundred Nartican eagles, based there, led by Stuart. They landed at the coastal region, to await the zero hour.

Drive by land, sea, and air. That was the plan.

Yet it would not be easy.

Scouting planes, roaming completely around his borders, found Tar Tane apparently impregnable. From the Rhine mouth to the Alps, the ancient Maginot Line was fully manned, and stuldded unbrokenly with heat-ray guns. He had mobilized perhaps five million men himself.

From the Alps to the Adriatic, Lar Tane had closed the gap, digging in where Perry had dug in for reverse reasons. From the Adriatic to Budapest, and from Budapest to the Baltic Sea, the other old-time Maginot Line was fully manned. And all the northern sea-coast was studded with heat-ray guns, against invasion by sea.

Curious parallel.

It was ancient Greater Germany again, hotbed of world ambitions, surrounded by enemies, holding off till the attack had drained itself, and then sweeping out. Lar Tane had won his World Empire that way in 2902. Would he succeed again?

Perry set his jaw grimly. Not if he could help it.

Drive by land, sea, and air.

The universe seemed to peer down, watching.

In the *Chicago,* Perry steamed slowly north, leading two-thirds of his fleet. At the Dover Straits, the expected enemy phalanx of ships blocked the way. Perry could picture coppery-haired Elda aboard her flagship, mocking, taunting: He could almost hear her voice:

"Trying it again? I'll throw you back, like the other time. This is 30th century war, the kind I know."

Perry felt cold and uncertain, as he gave the battle signal.

Would his mailed fist, in the first test,

smash futilely against a stone wall?

Battle began. Hell moved in.

FROM Elda's phalanx swept a storm of heat-beams. The sails of Perry's front line of ships caught fire. Men in the focus of the beam screamed horribly and turned lobster-red, slowly cooking alive. This heat-beam was far moré powerful than the one tested on New York.

Realizing that, Perry recalled his ragged front line, out of range, which seemed to be a mile. Waiting, there finally came a multiplied drone, and 200 Nartican bombing planes soared from their base in France, as prearranged. Perry had worked out a complete blitzkrieg time-table.

Perry shouted in his speaking tube, to the engine room of the *Chicago*.

"Full speed ahead! Man the guns!"

The *Chicago* leaped out, like a bulldog. Its guns thundered. Six-inch shells screamed across to the phalanx, in broadsides that needed no skilled aiming. Enemy ships shuddered and sank.

Back came the hellish heat-rays. But they met only metal. Thick armor plate that did not burn, as sails and wood did. And now the circling bombers dived, dropping their cargoes of death. Heat-rays stabbed up at them, here and there bringing a plane down, but there were many more.

Perry and his ghost-ship from the past swung back and forth across the phalanx, raking them mercilessly. Gaps appeared in the enemy line. Into these swarmed Perry's waiting attack ships. At close quarters, the deck mortars belched grapeshot at the enemy, wiping out heat-beam crews.

Before sundown, the phalanx broke, fled. Perry's victorious fleet sailed into the Straits and anchored.

"I thought you'd do better than that, Elda," Perry said to her image, triumphantly.

Triumphantly? The first step in victory. At the last step, Elda would be a prisoner of war, sentenced to die.

AT dawn, Perry's fleet approached its second objective—the Rhine plant.

Here, no ships opposed them. But when Perry tentatively sent a flight forward, invisible fire leaped from the ramparts of the huge plant, and from the beginning of the Maginot Line at the river's mouth. Long-range heat-rays that fired a ship's sails at better than two miles.

Perry recalled his ships and once again bellowed into his speaking tube. Going out alone, the *Chicago's* guns thundered. Shells whistled toward the plant. Salvos that sent showers of concrete, brick and steel flying. Again Stuart's eagles descended, raining down bombs. The Rhine plant slowly began to crumble, under the hammering.

But it took three days.

The Rhine plant had been protected with hundreds of heat-ray guns. Their upward stabbing beams brought down the air-fleet so rapidly that they no longer power-dived. Instead, they dropped their bombs haphazardly from a mile high. Many splashed harmlessly in the river, or in surrounding territory.

And the enemy, divining the formidable threat of the *Chicago,* concentrated a flood of heat-beams toward it. When the metal armor began slowly to heat up, endangering their arsenal, Perry slipped back. Elevating their guns, the crews found the new range by trial and error, and the bombardment kept up.

Three days later, the plant was a shambles. The last heat-beam flicked out, as its crew fled.

"Lar Tane and Elda may not know it, but they're done for," Aran Deen chortled. "With the Rhine plant gone,

Lar Tane's only metal source, it's just a question of time. He's like a Cyclops now, with the eye knocked out."

Perry nodded.

"Elda can't stop me now. I thought she'd put up a stiffer fight than this. Why didn't she think of mines, to stop the *Chicago?*"

The next step was simple. Moving to position, Perry shelled the first three miles of the Maginot Line, in conjunction with Stuart's bombers. Heat-beams blasted back furiously at first, then blinked out, one by one. A hole had been knocked in the Line!

A week later, half the fleet had disembarked and set up camp in the gap.

"Hold out, if the enemy attacks," Perry commanded. "When the order comes, march on Vinna!"

With the remaining third of his original fleet and men, Perry steamed back through the Dover Straits, toward Gibraltar, and beyond. Two weeks later he separated from the fleet, sending them up the Adriatic Sea, to land within marching distance of Budapest.

The *Chicago,* alone now, for the first time utilized its full speed. Like a greyhound of the seas it passed Crete, steamed through the Dardanelles, and turned north into the Black Sea. In three days it was turning into the Danube, and heading for Budapest.

At dawn of the fourth day, the *Chicago's* guns raked up and down the Maginot fortifications at Budapest, laughing at the heat-beams, blowing them out of existence. A five-mile gap in the Line allowed the Adriatic army, as soon as it arrived, to swarm in.

"Now we're ready," Aran Deen said, rubbing his hands.

Perry nodded, and sent the final signal, by plane.

THE *Chicago* had opened two holes in the impregnable Maginot Line. Into these poured his troops, at the Rhine and at Budapest. And at the south, where his Mannerheim Line had been, a third of his huge army, from France, crushed against that one weak link.

In the following month, Perry felt like some Alexander or Napoleon.

His planes reported steadily.

Pushing in at the Rhine gap, his army there had met enemy resistance, finally. Superior in rifles, cannon and attack tanks, Perry's forces broke through the enemy in three weeks. They were now steam-rolling toward Vinna.

At Budapest, the same had happened, Perry's army grinding forward inexorably. At the Mannerheim Line, it took the full month for Perry's forces to smash through, but now they, too, were marching on Vinna.

Blitzkrieg!

All Lar Tane's elaborate Maginot siege strategy was for nothing. The *Chicago,* war-engine of the 20th century, had cracked the nut wide open. The three-headed Juggernaut swept down on Vinna, heart of Lar Tane's crumbling empire—from the west, the east and the south.

Victory! He had it. Perry laughed at the image of emerald-eyed Elda in his mind. She had met her match on the battlefield at last, as well as on an inner front.

But the laugh was a grinding, sick one. The image he saw of her was with glorious eyes tear-wet, face sweet, tender. His armies tramped toward Vinna, to deliver her in his hands—for execution.

Unless something happened. Why had nothing happened to stop him? Was something *about* to happen? Perry was uneasy, with those submerged thoughts plaguing him constantly. Did Elda have some new trick up her sleeve, as the times before?

CHAPTER XXVII

Last Victory

THE *Chicago* weighed anchor and steamed up toward Vinna itself. The time had come for the last act.

Lar Tane had surrounded his capital city with almost a continuous ring of heat-ray guns. They held off the three armies, Stuart's diving planes, and even kept the *Chicago* far down the river.

Perry first had a message dropped within the city, to be delivered to Lar Tane.

"To Lar Tane and Elda. You've been defeated. You must know it yourselves. Surrender Vinna, and your persons. If you agree, fly a white flag from your central tower, at noon. If I don't see the flag, I attack. Perry, Lord of Earth."

At noon, Perry put down his binoculars with a curse.

"They refuse?" Aran Deen surmised. "I told you, Perry. The green-eyed wi—Elda will fight to the last. Neither of them is quite human."

Perry gave the attack signal, and all the elemental fury of war tore loose. Stuart's total fleet of warplanes droned two miles above, over the heat-rays, pouring down lethal cargo. The three armies sniped and bombarded with their mortars. The *Chicago* meticulously gunned all the heat-ray emplacements within range, and was then forced to wait, with ammunition low.

Yet, in a week, there was no sign of surrender.

"A city is not easy to reduce," Aran Deen stated. "They might hold out for months."

"They're mad!" Perry groaned, sick of the senseless carnage.

A plane swooped and a message bounced to the deck. Perry opened it with trembling fingers, hoping it was surrender. But it was from Stuart, not Elda.

"Perry. I flew low over the city, through a gap where the heat-rays were blasted out, to look over the situation. Going past Lar Tane's tower, I saw him standing there on the balcony. Apparently he watches every day, with arms folded. Perhaps he's mad, to let the hopeless fight go on. But suppose you aim for the tower with your ship's guns. I tried to bomb it, but missed. If you blast it, and him, I think the fight will be over. He has a magnetic hold on his troops that will inspire them to fight to the end. If he's gone, the spell is over. Blast that tower! Stuart."

"That will do it!" Aran Dean agreed fiercely. "Perry, can we hit the tower? It's twelve miles."

"I think we can," Perry groaned.

Aran Deen looked at him, startled. Then he knew. Elda Tane might be in that tower too, directing the battle from that central point. Aran Deen squinted his eyes toward the city.

"No," he said. "It would take many shells. Most would hit nearby houses, killing innocent women and children. We'll go on as we have, wearing down his military forces—"

"Don't make excuses for me," Perry blazed. "I'll blast that tower, and Lar Tane and Elda, and to hell with it all."

He leaped to a gun turret himself, and applied his eye to the ancient sights, with their accuracy unimpaired.

The tower was a barely visible sliver of shiny metal, even in the binocular sights, rearing among the structures of half-resurrected Vinna. Lar Tane's figure was a black dot on the crow's nest balcony. Perry could picture him with arms folded, surveying the battleground.

Napoleon at Waterloo.

And was Elda beside him at times, or below issuing swift orders to a streaming staff of officers?

"FIRE!" Perry yelled, setting the aim.

He watched in the glasses, as shell after shell arced over the city toward

that small target. Puffs of exploding debris dotted the vicinity around the tower. Houses shattering. Innocent women and children killed perhaps. But it would be swiftly over, if Lar Tane went. Otherwise it might go on for bloody weeks, with thousands of men sacrificed.

Always, in the past, key cities had held out insanely, magnificently, like Madrid and Warsaw, in the days his father told of. The people, besieged, fired by a mad courage. Perhaps believing, by some twisted psychology of Lar Tane's that they were in the right, against a world of barbarian invaders.

Why didn't Elda stop it? Was she as mad as her father? Had she hardened her heart against the lives thrown to the winds? That was the true Elda, letting this go on. More than ever, it beat in Perry's mind that there was only one way she could pay.

With her own life.

It must be ended. This was the way.

Shell after shell. And with each one, Perry winced. One hit and the tower would go. And Lar Tane. And Elda. And Elda. And Elda. Each shell screamed that, as it belched from the guns.

Suddenly it happened.

A puff of white smoke at the base of the tower. With the range at last, Perry drove a dozen more shells across. The tower rocked. Crazily it swayed, leaned, prepared to crash.

"Cease firing!" Perry shrieked.

All over the ship, the guns stopped. And minute by minute, as though a blanket of silence had dropped from a pitying sky, the dull roar of battle stopped everywhere. The heat-beams winked out. Stuart's planes buzzed high overhead, then left, their work over. The rattle of guns and cannon thumps died into the background of silence.

Stone Age quiet smothered all the frightful din of war.

Faintly, in his mind, Perry heard the echoing crash of a colossus, in that aching surcease of sound. A colossus that had begun its fall in the 30th century, and completed it now, after an age. Lar Tane's toppled empire.

It was over.

PERRY left the *Chicago* and marched his troops of occupation into the city. Detachments branched away, to disarm the surrendered troops. Perry went on, toward the tower. Each step jarred through his brain like a sledge-blow.

Aran Deen, hobbling at his side, slowly shook his head.

"You saved weeks of slaughter, Perry," he mumbled. "But at a terrific cost—to you."

Perry's stony face gave no sign of hearing.

A plane dropped from above and landed daringly in the torn air-field before the tower. Stuart stepped out and ran forward.

"Perry—"

Whatever words of triumph Stuart had been about to shout he left unsaid. With a look at his younger brother's face, he fell in step beside him, silently.

The base of the tower was a smoking ruin. But the tower itself, by a miracle, still stood upright, leaning at a crazy angle. They stopped before it, looking up. Lar Tane's body lay crumpled on the balcony. A flying piece from the shells had struck him, perhaps.

A gasp went up.

The figure stirred, staggered to its feet. Clutching the balcony rail, Lar Tane looked around, swaying. Blood dripped from a deep wound in his chest. He looked down, at the watch-

ing figures below.

He saluted Perry, and there was defiant mockery in the gesture. Whatever else Lar Tane had been, he was not a weakling. He took defeat, in that one magnificent gesture, like a proud and unhumbled monarch.

He stiffened, lifting his head arrogantly. Folding his arms, he looked out over the city, out over the world, taking one last look at the empire that might have been his. Then, with a little leap, he threw himself over the balcony rail. His figure hurtled down into the jagged debris below.

Perry looked at the body, lying broken and sprawled on the ruins. He suppressed the moan on his lips. Somewhere within, another body lay, crushed more horribly.

He stood rigidly, while searching parties scrabbled within, for any that might be alive. Would he have one more glimpse of the emerald glory of her eyes, before they faded in death? He trembled, afraid to face the next moment.

Ten crushed bodies were brought out. Six more were reported pinned hopelessly under fallen walls. All men, Elda's staff of aides and generals.

Where was Elda's body?

"We can't find it," was the report. "One room is completely caved in."

She must be in there, ground to pulp. Perry's shoulders sagged. It was best that way, after all.

He turned away, brokenly.

Aran Deen squeezed his arm.

"Look—"

Perry looked, vacantly.

Then a cry rasped from his throat.

STUART had been gone for some minutes. He reappeared now, a hundred yards away, from beyond the tower ruins. With him was Elda, leaning on his arm. A trickle of blood ran from a slight cut in her smooth temple. She walked slowly, as though not sure of herself. But otherwise she was unharmed.

Elda was alive—alive!

"Not alive!" his thoughts groaned. "Anything but that."

For now, the war over, came the implacable aftermath — her execution. The world would cry for it. In an earlier time, she might have fled to a neutral country, in exile. There was no such spot on Earth, now.

She stood before him.

The impact of her beauty, first seen after six months, was like a blow to Perry. Coppery cascade of hair, shining in the sun. Ivory face of cameo-cut features. Green eyes that stared haughtily around, unyielding as ever. Whatever her fate, she would accept it unflinchingly.

She saw her father's body. Only a slight quiver of her lips, a momentary flash of tender pain, showed what she felt. Then she turned back to Perry, head high.

Green eyes met grey eyes, wordlessly.

They stood as in a painted picture. The commander who had lost, and the commander who had won. No, there was no commander who had won.

They had both lost.

The crowd about murmured. Muttered against her, lovely demon who had led legions of death. And the people of the city, the worn, defeated troops, muttered loudest, as though awakening rudely from the evil spell she and her father had cast, leading them to catastrophe.

"Elda—"

Perry went on with his eyes, trying to tell her that what was to come was forced from him. She made no response, no sign of understanding. The emerald eyes were cold, even mocking. She was the Elda of the mask, asking

no mercy.

Perry straightened.

The crowd was watching. There could be no unbending, no compromise, with what she represented. The world must realize, with her going, that there would be a new world, a new way.

Elda, symbol of war and merciless ways of might, had to be sacrificed on this altar of a new faith.

Perry spoke ringingly, for all to hear. The world was listening. And perhaps somewhere in a higher realm, higher beings who shook their heads pityingly.

"Lar Tane is dead! The creed of rule by force dies with him. The Magna Charta of humanity will be adopted. For your part in the attempt to smash that course, I sentence you, Elda Tane—"

"WAIT!"

Stuart's voice had burst in. He took a step forward.

"Perry, listen. I found Elda in the prison room, under the tower. She was imprisoned there, by Lar Tane! She wasn't the commander of his forces, in this last campaign. She hasn't been, for six months!"

Perry struggled up from dark depths.

"Elda, is it true?"

His voice was a ragged whisper.

She spoke without appeal.

"Yes. When I returned from Nartica, I told my father he was wrong. For six months, I told him that. When you attacked, I refused to lead our forces. He imprisoned me below the tower."

Was she lying, to save her skin? Hoping to arouse the sympathy of the crowd? And of him? Had Stuart and she devised this cheap scheme?

Stuart had dragged a captured officer forward, questioning him.

"Elda was not our commander," he vouched. "On the day of the attack, at the Rhine, she came and screamed that we must not fight. It was then Lar Tane had her imprisoned."

Aran Deen was peering at the girl. There was something soft in his wrinkled old face as he peered from her to Perry.

"And you didn't tell of the destroyer, Elda?" Aran Deen queried. "Else your father would have made mines, or slung steel nets before the Rhine and Budapest. You didn't tell, did you, Elda?"

She shook her head.

"If she had, the war would still be going on—for years!" the old seer said loudly, for the benefit of the crowd. "She brought it to a quick close!"

The audience murmured, and suddenly burst out into cheers. In one instant, Elda Tane had become almost a heroine, in that act of omission. In the glaring light of peace, all things were bright.

Aran Deen smiled and mumbled to himself.

"Human nature is a queer thing. Elda Tane will be remembered in history more for this than all before. And rightly so. The courage to change convictions is greater than any other, in this strange groping called life."

Aran Deen raised his arm again to speak, seeing that Perry had apparently fallen into a stupefied trance.

"In behalf of Stirnye, Lord of Earth, I grant full pardon to Elda Tane, as to all who took part in the rebellion. It is past and forgotten!"

And now the assemblage, soldiers of Lar Tane and Perry alike, burst out in full-throated acclaim.

"Hail, Stirnye, Lord of Earth!"

Stirnye! Stirnye! They had called him that. Perry choked, as the spirit of his father seemed to look down on the scene.

ARAN DEEN smiled and pushed Perry forward, toward Elda.

"Give the crowd something to really cheer about, you young fool."

"Elda—"

It was a hoarse croak from Perry as he stumbled toward her.

She flew in his arms, weeping against his shoulder unashamedly. She was the true Elda again, soft, tender, feminine.

"Dearest!" she whispered. "This was the empire I wanted, without knowing it. The empire of love. Don't let me go—ever!"

She wiped away her tears happily after a moment.

"We'll build our home here, in Vinna. I don't like New York. We'll raise our sons here."

"Tamed?" Aran Deen asked himself. "I wonder. Perry will find out his job has just begun, with the green-eyed witch."

But the old seer grinned like a monkey, thinking it.

The crowd's cheer, at sight of the couple together, was whole-hearted. The way of a man and girl, changing little with the passing of time and circumstance, was a fitting climax to the dark days past.

Like the glory of a summer dawn, it spread a glow that seemed to light a new world to come.

(Continued from page 6)

like to get more of this kind of story, but for some reason they are hard to write—so say our writers. How about you readers sitting down and taking a crack at it? Huh?

WE'VE presented many stories of new inventions, but the other day we ran across a true story of the invention of safety glass. And because it is so interesting, we present it as part of the Observatory's "amazing stories of true science" department. And here's the story:

Safety glass was discovered quite by accident as had been the case in so many of our useful inventions.

It was about thirty-five years ago that a French chemist was amazed when a bottle he had dropped while working in his laboratory "cracked up" but did not shatter. He quickly examined the bottle and found that it had been filled with collodion and that a thin film of this substance inside the bottle had held the pieces together. He did not think that his discovery would be of any great value until he read in the newspapers of how flying glass had cut a girl in an automobile accident.

Remembering the bottle in his laboratory, he started to perfect a practical safety glass. The perfection of safety glass took many years and much money was spent until a glass was produced which would not only be safe, but also would permit a person to see through it.

Today, safety glass is manufactured by placing a sheet of plastic between two plates of glass and subjecting them to a very high heat and pressure which causes the three parts to become one piece of safety glass. Thus, when the glass is broken by an impact or a direct blow, the pieces do not fly about, but stick to the plastic.

This accidental discovery has been responsible for saving thousands of lives as well as avoiding serious injuries for victims of automobile accidents each year.

MOTHER NATURE must have long ago given the rubber trees the secret of self-preservation because they have a way all their own to protect themselves from the ravages of tropical storms. The amazing fact seems to be the rubber tree knows what's going on!

This fact was observed by scientists of the United States Department of Agriculture, who have been experimenting with growing rubber trees in Florida. They were not sure of the ability of the rubber trees to withstand either the Florida winters or the devastating Florida winds. They were satisfied about the latter when they saw the rubber trees in action. When the winds reached hurricane velocity, the trees dropped their leaves which tended to cut wind resistance towards the top of the tree. This, in turn, reduced the pressure on the tree trunk and prevented it from becoming uprooted. After the wind quieted down, the trees produced new leaves and apparently suffered no ill-effect.

MALCOLM SMITH, who painted last month's rocket ship cover, has an announcement to make. His latest work of art is a son who will soon be engaged in making his first definite scrawls toward becoming an AMAZING STORIES artist just like his dad. Congratulations, Mr. Smith! We hope the

boy makes swift progress. We could use another artist or two in this magazine!

MOST of us have been drinking tea for many years, but do not know the many strange facts concerning its growth and preparation.

Strange as it may seem all the types of tea known as Orange Pekoe, Hyson, Souchong, Oolong, Gunpowder, etc., come from the same plant, the various names only designating to the tea expert the portion of the plant and the size of the leaves used to produce the tea. The most tender buds found at the tip of the tea plant produce the best quality tea called Orange-Pekoe. The young leaves near the top of the plant also produce a fine quality tea called Gunpowder tea. The medium-sized leaves produce young Hyson tea, while the largest and poorest leaves produce the grade known as Souchong.

Basically, green tea and black tea are also one and the same tea, but different methods of preparation produce the two types. And those of you who thought that all there was to producing tea was to pick the leaves off of the plant and pack them are badly mistaken.

If black tea is desired, the tea leaves must be spread out on large trays for a few hours until they wilt and become soft and velvety.

The next step is the removal of the oils and juices in the leaves by rolling them on stone tables until the leaf cells break open. Then comes the roasting process followed by a good drying at a temperature of 240 degrees F.

The production of green tea differs in that the wilting, rolling and roasting steps are skipped and the leaves are immediately dried after they are gathered to destroy the ferments.

ANOTHER fact you probably didn't know was that there are at least two species of plants in our own country that can produce a fair tea. In the days before our fight for independence, the people in the Colonies refused to buy tea from the Orient because of the unreasonable tea taxes. The colonists discovered that the leaves of a very common plant which they called the New Jersey Tea plant would produce a tea that could be used as a substitute for imported tea.

The youpon or carblina tea plant found in our southern states also produce a tea that is even finer than the New Jersey tea plant.

Both of these plants might be cultivated commercially if our supply of tea is cut off from the Orient.

EVERY time a scientist makes a new discovery, he creates a new problem. Here's an example of that paradox.

The problem of how to dispose of lignin, the residue left when cellulose is taken out of wood pulp for making paper, rayon, and other products, has always bothered the forester. All that he could do with it was to dump it into the river and consider it a dead loss.

But this appalling waste bothered many people and so they tried to find some use for this by-product. Finally, chemists of the United States Forest Products Laboratory, in Madison, Wisconsin, found a way to combine the lignin with hydrogen to form a very valuable by-product.

Chemists have already discovered five products that can be produced depending upon the amount of hydrogen used in the process. One product is methanol or wood alcohol which is used in many industries. A second compound can be used as a laquer solvent and as a wood preservative. Two of the products show possibilities of being used as plastics, which is the up and coming industry today. The fifth products is produced in a crystalline form and is used in the manufacture of lacquers and waterproof adhesives.

Today, lignin, a former useless by-product, is considered as important as the wood-pulp in trees.

NEXT month we are going to present a story you'll go for in a big way. It is "The World With a Thousand Moons" by Edmond Hamilton. This is the kind of story Ed is famous for, and the kind he likes to do. You'll agree when you read it that he should keep right on doing this kind of thing. Incidentally, we sent him two illustrations the other day and we expect manuscripts on them any day now. Ed has gone for this new (to him) experiment in a big way. For some reason this method seems to challenge our writers into stronger efforts and the result is better stories.

And this just about winds up the Observatory for another session. We'll be back next month with more of the same.

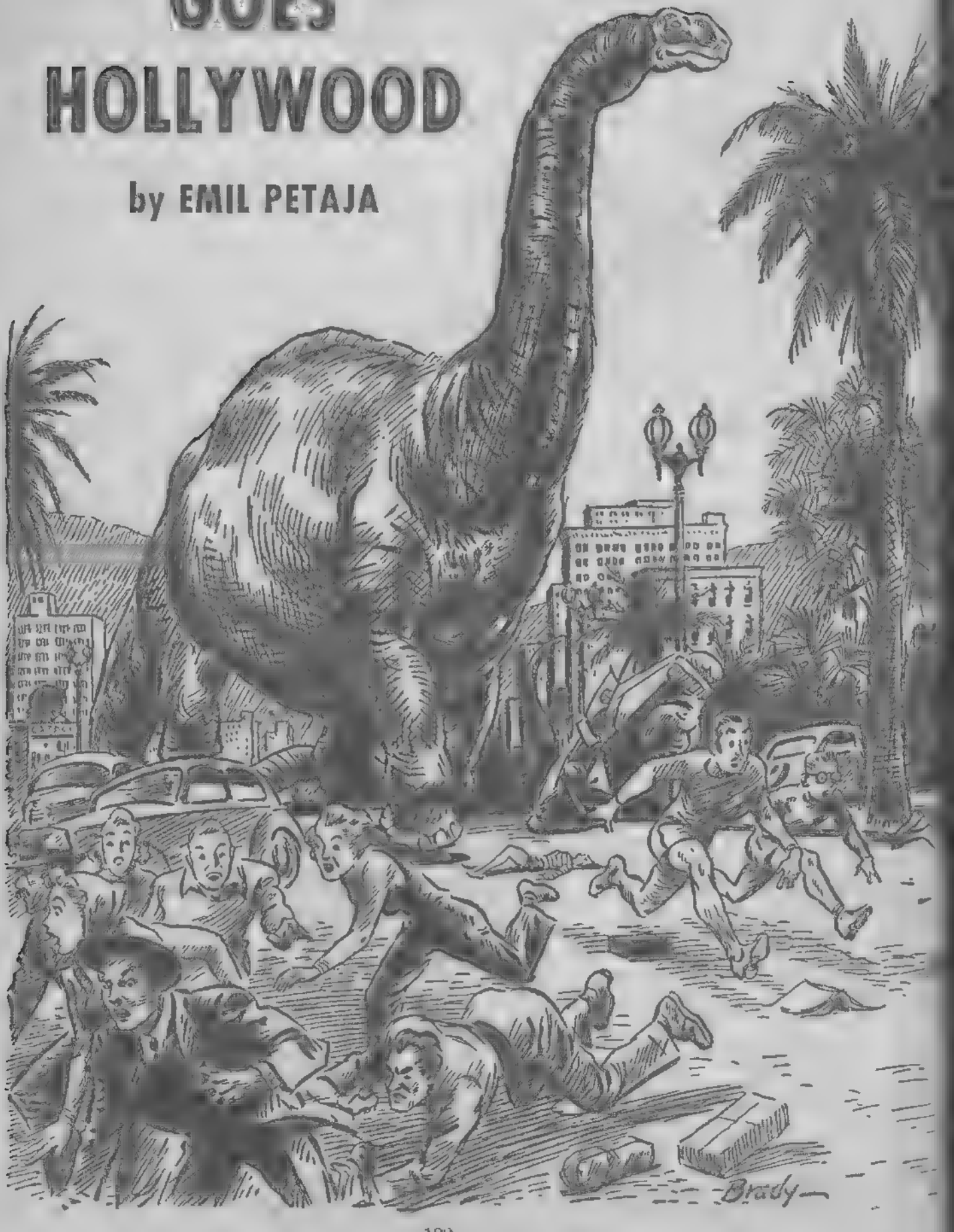
Rap.

"And if at first you don't succeed—never mind!"

DINOSAUR GOES HOLLYWOOD

by EMIL PETAJA

The giant creature stalked through Hollywood's streets



EVERYTHING happens to me!

First some slap-happy character gets me so jumpy I can't even go out on the piazza and look at the stars with Susie May any more, without shuddering. It's about that gargantuan space-ship that is going to smash up the whole world next April. So he said.

Then it happened again. Susie May dragged me over to Hollywood to a Colossus Production premiere of *Never Never*, at the Cathay Square Theatre. We sat on crowded benches outside for a dime, watching the celebrities parade in. Susie May loved it.

Afterward she said for me to wait for her, while she ran over to get Percy Parrish's autograph. I told her I'd be in the Xotik bar-room, having a drink.

I sat at a corner table, sipping my sasparilla, and minding my own business—when all at once somebody slapped me hard on the back, making me give a stout gentleman at the next table a free shower bath.

"Hyah, chum!" this brawny individual said, grinning.

"I don't know you," I said coldly, looking him up and down through my heavy bifocals as if I had trouble even seeing him.

This individual was six-foot-four, at least. He had a beef-and-gravy appearance. Ex-football tackle, was my first impression.

He wasn't put out, as I had hoped.

"I'm Jock Wemple!" he grinned

It was a grand thing to have a real dinosaur in the cast of this super-colossal picture, but a different matter roaming the streets!

jovially, extending an oversize hand. "Shake!"

I shook, then removed what was left of my hand, and massaged it tenderly, saying "Damn!" under my breath.

"Want I should tell you a story?" the individual named Jock Wemple suggested. He ordered three beers—to save the waiter trips.

"That premiere reminds me of one. About another premiere here at Cathay Square—some years ago. A scientific picture called *Back To The Dawn*. Remember?"

"No!" I said decisively. "And I don't care to—"

"Come on, chum! It'll pin your ears back!"

"Et tu, Brute," I interposed sadly.

"Say, I know I ain't no Tyrone Power," he grinned crookedly. "But you don't need to call me no brute! Who are you, anyhow?"

"Lemuel Mason is my name," I told him. "I'm a bookkeeper by profession. Consolidated Cement." I restrained a smile so as not to encourage him.

He nodded amiably. He seemed to take my introduction as a sign of approval, for he immediately swung into his story—

"LIKE I already told you, I'm Jock Wemple. I used to be bodyguard and handy man for the big-shot scientist Stanton Greylock. Of course that was after I'd spent the best nine years of my life on a college football team. Learning pursuing—as they say . . .

"Stanton Greylock was a small size guy with a droopy straw moustache. He always looked kind of sad, like as if he just got a letter edged in black. Maybe it was his cloudy gray eyes. I don't know what he had to be sad about, though. He wasn't married.

"Anyhow Greylock was one of the smartest guys in this country, or any place. Why, he won the Nobel prize twice running, with one hand tied behind his back!

"Me, I don't know anything about science. I thought it meant 'No Smoking' until I took this job with Greylock."

I cleared my throat importantly:

"Until he disappeared so strangely four years ago, Stanton Greylock was considered the world's foremost authority of certain phases of physics and related sciences," I put in, from my store of library magazine knowledge. "He was also keenly interested in paleontology."

"Is that a fact?" Wemple blinked, somewhat put out. "Well, to get back to my story—

"That morning Greylock and me drove out to the La Brea Pits. Our station wagon was loaded to the roof with all kinds of scientific junk, including what looked like an old-time radio set, mounted on wheels.

" 'What gives with all this junk, Doc?' I asks.

" 'I am going to try an experiment in Time,' he told me solemnly. 'Scientists have frequently dreamed of traveling backward or forward in Time. Personally, my research convinces me that it can be done. But the risks involved are so great that one would be foolhardy to attempt it.

" 'I have another plan—a much less dangerous plan. Simpler, and yet it presents an infinite variety of fascinating possibilities . . .

" 'What I propose to do,' Doc says, his face kind of shining, 'is to employ what I call a Time-Net to snare—from out of the past—something that will be of value to science. Preferably a living creature.'

" 'Such as?' I asks.

" 'Mmmm,' Doc answered. I didn't get it. But if Doc wanted to snare

around for something out of back-time it was okay with me.

"I turned the station wagon off Wilshire Boulevard, and eased gently down a bump that led us into the La Brea Park. Where the big stone lizards are.

" 'Ah, here we are, Jock,' Doc says, rubbing his hands together anxiously. 'Park over by those bushes. Then help me unload and prepare the Time-Net.'

"IT WAS a lulu of a gold-spangled morning. And it was bright and early. Traffic on Wilshire wasn't heavy yet.

"I carted out all that heavy apparatus, and set it out just the way Doc directed me to. He picked a nice clear spot on the other side of a low footbridge, near one of those scummy dank-looking tar holes.

"I lugged for a while, and got pretty fagged.

" 'Say, Doc,' I says. 'Why don't we pick some place what's easier to get to. Where there ain't no marshes. I know a swell stretch down by the beach—'

" 'You don't understand, Jock,' he says, waggling his head. 'I don't imagine that you even know what La Brea is famous for?'

"He eyed me hopefully, while he fiddled with gadgets on the machine that looked something like a radio.

"I blushed, and looked away. Over at one of those stone lizards.

" 'I'll take a moment to explain,' Doc said kindly. 'La Brea Pits is famous as being the site of a remarkable discovery of dinosaur fossils from the Mesozoic Age. You really ought to avail yourself of the collection of fossils at the Exposition Museum, which were taken from La Brea.

" 'You see, Jock—a long, long time ago there were great pits of tar right here. And many of these great lumbering lizard creatures became mired in this tar. They died in the tar, and it preserved their bones remarkably well through the ages, in fossil form.

" 'Paleozoologists have been able to reconstruct these fossils into replicas of these Mesozoic dinosaurs. We know just about exactly what they looked like . . .

" 'What is most important to us, Jock, is that we know positively that dinosaurs were evident at this exact spot, in the Mesozoic Age. That's why I chose this place for my first experiment . . .' "

"You have a remarkable memory, Mr. Wendt," I observed, astonished at his use of words.

"That's nothing," Wendt said sheepishly, wiping a moustache of beer foam off his upper lip. "After what happened later I made it a point to find out about them."

"Now," I said, sliding toward the door. "If you don't mind I'll just—"

"Siddown!" Wendt growled. His vexed look vanished right away, and he went on— "Doc Greylock told me exactly how to rig up his Time-Net, while for the next half hour he kept tinkering with the knobs and wheels on his gadget.

"Finally he announced that he was all ready to start, and told me to get outside the circle which his Time-Net enclosed.

"Then he lugged out a special metal box from the station wagon—he wouldn't let me lay a finger on it—and unlocked it. Very carefully he unwrapped a round white thing that looked like a big egg.

" 'Stand back!' he yelled to me. 'Away from the Net zone!' And he tossed this egg into the middle of the circle.

"It burst. Clouds of vapor shot out on all sides of it. Pretty soon the

circle was covered with a queer yellow fog, thick as pea soup.

"'Now what?' I asks, looking at the yellow fog warily.

"'There's nothing we can do but wait,' Doc says. 'My Time-Net is all set. If my calculations are correct we should snare something very soon. That circle of space enclosed by my Net has been transferred back to the Mesozoic Age!'

"WE WAITED. And waited.

"Nothing happened. Doc sent me out for lunch, and to bring him back a ham-and from a delicatessen. And then we waited some more.

"Doc had arranged to have cops guard all the entrances to the little park, so that no curious bystanders would get into anything.

"Toward evening I commenced to get restless. I had a torrid date with a dame called Ethel. One of those ravaging blondes. What that babe can do with a sweater—boy!

"We were planning on going to the big *Back To The Dawn* premiere, using passes Doc gave me. The studio sent them to him, on account he was what you call a—uh—I dunno. A scientific stooge on the picture. They'd ask him if such-and-such was authentic, and when he said no, they'd go right ahead and put it in anyhow.

"It was sure a break for me. I was borrowing Doc's low-slung Dusenberg. Make a big splash with Ethel.

"So about five o'clock, I reminded the Doc.

"He heaved a couple sighs. 'You're right, Jock,' he says sadly. 'We may as well go home. The yellow fog is almost gone, and nothing's appeared yet. I must have made a mistake somewhere. I'll go over to my laboratory and check over my computations.'

"He asked the cops to stand guard for a couple hours more just in case. Then we packed up the Time-Net, and scrammed.

"Back home, I slipped into my tux, looking pretty zootsuit if I do say so. Then I drove over and picked up Ethel.

"She had poured herself into one of those Dorothy. LaMarr slinkers, and made me wish I had on dark glasses. Did she glitter!

"We stopped for dinner at the Brown Derby, me blowing half a week's pay to make a good impression. Then I lit a Corona-Corona, and sent the hack purring down Wilshire Boulevard toward the Cathay Square Théatre. I was all set for a large evening . . .

"I slid Ethel a shy-violet look, and then all of a sudden saw her pretty pan change into a mask of surprised horror.

"'What's the beef?' I inquired.

"'*Look!*' she screamed, pointing out the side window. '*A monster!*'

"I LOOKED.

"She wasn't kidding! We were right near the La Brea Pits again, and, shambling out of the Doc's Time-Net circle on mammoth earth-shaking pins, flopping a gigantic tail behind him, was a dinosaur! . '

"I knew right away that was what he was because he looked a lot like one of them stone lizards in the park, only ten times bigger. Also he looked like a model of a dinosaur what was worked by a man inside it—that I saw when I was out at a Colossus Picture's set, when they were shooting *Back To The Dawn*.

"Ethel shrieked again, blotting the sight away with her red-nailed fingers.

"I braked the car at the curb, and sat rubbering at the dino. What a sight he was! Must have been fifty feet high, and bigger than six elephants rolled into one.

"He made a kind of slobbering noise with his mouth, and weaved his long serpentine neck slowly from side to side. He looked like he was plenty surprised, too, to find himself in the middle of Hollywood — instead of among a lot of funny looking fern trees back in the Mesozoic Age.

"He was brilliantly colored—sort of orange and vivid green shades—and from him there came an ugly swamp odor . . .

"He looked around with his silly little eyes, and that simpery smile on his homely snake's puss. He didn't seem much bothered by the gaping crowd that stopped their cars to stand around him and look—but nobody got very close.

"There was a couple minor smash-ups, and three or four frails passed out cold, but nothing very serious happened.

"At last he headed out, seeming to know just where he wanted to go. He lumbered thunderously out into the middle of Wilshire Boulevard, which was blocked off for the big premiere. He paid no attention to the frantic drivers, just shuffled nonchalantly toward the Cathay Square Theatre, his long snaky neck still weaving slowly from side to side.

"It was almost like daylight, on account of all the searchlights. They stabbed up into the dark sky. Hollywood's way of telling everybody what's coming off.

"Ethel shuddered, putting her taffy hair up close to me. I was making the most of the situation when a cop poked his head in the window and barked,

" 'Say, you're Doctor Greylock's handy man, aren't you?'

" 'I'm his assistant,' I corrected him.

" 'This is his car, ain't it?' he snapped. 'Where is the Doc? He told three of my boys to stand guard over the La Brea Pits entrances, but he didn't let on *this* was going to happen! That monster's on the loose! You'd better get hold of Greylock right away!'

" 'Sure,' I says, letting loose of Ethel. 'Right now!'

"I FOUND Doc Greylock puttering away in his lab.

" 'I think I know what was wrong now,' he said almost happily, nodding to me as I stepped in. 'My calculations were inaccurate by only a few hours. If we hurry right over to La Brea—'

" 'Doc!' I yells. 'You found out too late! It's come already!'

" 'What—' he started to say.

" 'The dinosaur! One of those giant lizards! He's lumbering along up Wilshire toward the premiere! Holy sugar-bags—if we don't get up there and do something, I don't know what'll break loose in that mob up there!'

He jumped back a little, looking at me kind of funny, then started frantically building one of his Time-Bombs.

" 'Jock, we must hurry!' he rasps, his hands flying around the table, mixing chemicals. 'Not a minute to lose! I'll never forgive myself if—'

" 'Take it easy, Doc,' I warns him. 'You'll blow a fuse if you don't slow down. I'll get all the junk loaded in the station wagon, and send Ethel home in a cab.'

"I went out, and done it. I was plenty excited, myself, but I knew somebody better keep on the beam, else we'd never even get over there.

"Ethel was glad to go home. She said her mother would kick her out in the street if she went cavorting around with a mess of zoic monsters. Hollywood woof-woofs was bad enough.

"It wasn't long until we were spinning burn-rubber down side streets. I wanted to make time. We finally got

within a couple blocks of the theatre. There the crowds stopped us.

"I used a little Hollywood lip-magic about being chauffeur to a movie mogul who had to get through. That got us a ways in, but then the crowd wouldn't budge.

"The crowd was gabbing hilariously. I heard one slick haired bozo shout to his red-head gal, 'This here Brindell van Hastings sure does things up right! Imagine a mechanical monster what's that big! I wouldn't have believed it had I not seen it!'

"'Ain't it the truth, Joe,' the red-head wagged, gleefully. 'You wouldn't know it from a real whatdumacallus, wouldja?'

"Doc groaned.

"'Get them, Doc!' I yelled in exasperation. 'They all think it's part of the show! They think it's a studio prop, built for use in the movie, and lumbering around as an advertising stunt!'

"STILL groaning, Doc stepped out of the car, pulling me with him.

"'We've got to get further in, through this crowd!' he yells. 'But how?'

"'Follow me!' I tells him. I wasn't a football tackle nine years just for fun.

"It wasn't long before we were in the dress circle.

"We gave the dinosaur a close-up look.

"'A brontosaurus!' Doc yells delightedly.

"'Yeah?' is my comment. 'Well, he *is* beginning to look irritated. I don't think he likes Hollywood night life. Nobody seems to have been hurt yet, but—'

"Doc's dinosaur did look peeved. His flabby lips drew back in a snarl, showing his teeth. He sort of bristled up on his hind legs, like a walking mountain, and his snaky neck darted from one side to the other.

"He still headed for the theatre, shaking the earth as he shambled along the little flag-laden parkway in the middle of the wide boulevard. Right across from his great shadowy bulk was the theatre entrance, blazing with light.

"There, under a flower-banked canopy were the stars of *Back To The Dawn,* Dorothy LaMarr and Stanley Smoosh, dithering into a microphone.

"Suddenly, as I glanced around, I heard a lot of commotion off to one side. Then Brindell van Hastings' fat torso pushed out of the sidelines, followed by a flock of cameramen and props carrying cameras and flood-lights.

"Brindell van Hastings was one of Hollywood's ace flicker men. He was producer-director of the premiere opus. He yelled and gesticulated at his men.

"They propped up their sound cameras and flood-lights, and went to work, under his orders.

"There were about half a million other cameras snapping and blinking up at Doc's brontosaurus, too. Reporters, newsreel men, and amateurs. No wonder the dino was annoyed.

"He unclamped his jaws, slavered, and uttered a thunderous squeal. Then he lumbered over and dumped one of the cameras, sending the cameraman sprawling.

"'You big baboon!' Van Hastings yells, shaking his fist up at him. He whirled on his men. 'Get all this action, you nincompoops—or I'll chop you!'

"'QUICK, Jock!' Doc Greylock yells, pulling my arm. 'You start wheeling the Time-Net out, and set the cable up around him, while I go and enlist the aid of the police!'

"So I started carting the junk out

of the station wagon, shoving bystanders aside.

" 'What's up, Bub?' the guy with the red-head asks importantly, grabbing my arm.

" 'Listen,' I tells him. 'That dino is on the level. And if you and this whole bunch of boobs knows what's good for you, you'll blow!' There upon I socked him for being so familiar.

"Things commenced to happen thick and fast after that.

"Word spread around that the dino wasn't a fakus, and before long the whole mob was bleating and milling like a herd of sheep.

"It was my last trip. I wheeled the Doc's gadget ahead of me like a kiddie-car. The monster started cleaning up.

"I heard a shrill feminine shriek. It was Dorothy LaMarr. Her dress was gold, and shone fit to knock your eyes right out through the back of your head.

"I wouldn't know whether the dino liked that or didn't like it. Anyway, he made a sideways grab at her with one of his slow-moving nippers—the size of a steam-shovel scoop.

"I was too far away to do anything. Not that I would have anyway. Who but a dope wants to pick on a walking mountain?

"But Stanley Smoosh did something. He started to run away. His cute face was drained white as a blotter.

"But his foot got tangled up in the train of Dorothy LaMarr's dress, and he fell flat, right plop on Dorothy.

"This was a break for her, as it turned out, on account of the dino missed her, and had to draw his claw back for another grab.

"By this time Dorothy and Stanley Smoosh, hugging each other like they never even had done in flickers, crawled hurriedly away to hide in a hole somewhere.

"WHICH wasn't a bad idea.

"Me, I had to get real close to the monster, in order to set out the boundaries for the Time-Net. He caught sight of me, and turned on me curiously.

"The place was a pandemonium. Everybody was wise by now that this was the real McCoy. Not a reasonable facsimile.

"They were shrieking, and yelling, and trampling each other underfoot. Made a kind of Roman holiday of it.

"Van Hastings' cameras were still rolling, getting it all in. He stood off to one side, yelling directions. His strident voice topped them all.

"I edged around the dino, spreading out the heavy coil of wires that was to mark the Time-Net limits. And when I edged, he edged.

"His snaky head weaved downward to get a good look at what I was up to. His funny eyes blinked at me coldly.

"Finally I had the time circle around him. I knocked down a couple of Van Hastings' flood-lights to do it, and he let loose with a couple of old Armenian curses.

" 'Go peel an apple-knocker,' I says.

"I caught a glimpse of Doc running toward me and the dino, with a battery of cops on his tail. I turned to yell at him.

"About that time I felt a slimy claw reach around my mid-section, and sweep me up in the air. First thing I knew the palms, searchlights, and mob was all way down below.

"I sweated, struggled, and yelled. Then I was peering into the ugliest puss I ever hope to see. Awful green and brown and orange, with cold lizard's eyes, and a red gaping mouth. The odor that came out of it gagged me.

" 'Let me down, King Kong!' I hollers. 'You're pinching my belly!'

"Down below, running back and

forth, was Doc Greylock. And in his hand he held the Time-Bomb.

"'Throw it!' I yells.

"'No!' his far-off voice protests. 'You don't want to go back to the Mesozoic too, do you?'

"I could see what he meant. It looked bad."

"WHAT happened, Mr. Wemple?" I asked breathlessly. Very deliberately, he called the waiter over, and ordered three more beers.

"You ain't interested, chum," Wemple grinned aggravatingly. "No. You don't want to hear my story. I'll stop now!"

"Please, Mr. Wempel," I said very humbly. "Don't stop now! The brontosaurus has got you in his clutches!"

"Okay, chum," he grinned. "I was only kidding. Well—

"The idea was to get him to set me down easy, if possible. Instead of plucking me to pieces, or tossing me clear down to Central Avenue. . . .

"I yanked out this little pen knife I always carry on the other end of my watch chain. I jabbed it into his claw.

"He let out a funny squeal, looking down at me questioningly.

"I jabbed him again. He swung me around until I didn't know from nothing.

"I found out later Doc distracted him some way, and he swung his claw down, tossing me carelessly away. I passed out cold.

"But not before I vaguely glimpsed Doc draw back, like a Notre Dame left end, and toss his Time-Bomb . . .

"When I woke I was lying on grass. That scared me. Grass! I didn't dare open my eyes for a couple seconds. Then somebody grabbed my arms, and turned me over.

"I blinked my peepers open. 'Doc!' I yells. 'Are we in the Mesozoic?'

"'No, Jock.' Doc felt me over for broken bones. 'I thought you'd be half-dead. You seem to be indestructible!'

"'Where's our playmate?' I asks, pushing up on my pins, and squinting dizzily around.

"He'd tossed me on the parkway grass, which helped break my fall a trifle. But no brontosaurus could I see.

"'Back where he came from,' Doc says. 'A sadder and wiser lizard, no doubt. You know, Jock, I've just figured out something that has been puzzling me for some time. Just why the dinosaur was so persistent in his drive to get to the Theatre—'

"'Maybe he ain't never seen a premiere,' I puts in.

"'Jock, I think the Cathay Square Theatre is now standing in the exact spot that was his home-site, back in the Mesozoic. Instinct immediately brought him here, and when he didn't find his mate waiting for him, he became furious.

"'The brontosaurus was a herbivorous lizard. He wouldn't have eaten anyone, but—'

"'But he sure could have trampled this joint into a shambles!' I finished for him.

"THE police herded the crowd gently away, but a lot of them stayed. The feeling persisted that this had been all part of the show. And would you believe it, they went right ahead with the premiere.

"A medium sized crowd hemmed us in, curious-eyed. All at once Brindell van Hastings bristled through, and marched importantly up to the Doc.

"'So you're the scientist who invented the Time-Net, that brought back the dinosaur!' he cries, sizing the Doc up. He shoved a paper and pen into

Doc's hands. 'Sign right there, on the dotted line!'

"'What is—?' Doc begins puzzledly.

"Van Hastings looked around him fearfully, as if he was afraid of rival studio spies, and then bent over pompously and whispered something in Doc's ear.

"*'What did you say?'* Doc exclaims.

"Van Hastings gives a repeat performance. This time I shove my shell-like ear in and get the low-down.

"It was like this: Van Hastings wanted Doc Greylock to use his Time-Net to reach back in time and snare glamor gals like Cleopatra, Salome, and Helen of Troy, right out of their boudoirs—*for him to star in exclusive autobiographical movies of their lives!*

"*Wow!* I waited eagerly to hear what sad-faced old Doc Greylock would say to that. Knowing how he never had much use for women before, I doubted that he would approve.

"Doc's eyes glittered. He pulled at his straw moustache, like he always did when in deep thought.

"'Van Hastings!' he says suddenly. 'I will not sign on any dotted line! I will not get Cleopatra and Salome out of the past—for you to star in your misinformative epics! But you have given me a very marvelous idea! Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to—'"

"LEM MASON, I'm surprised at you!" a shocked feminine voice behind me cried.

I was following Jock Wempel's narrative breathlessly, so only glanced back in annoyance. But one glance was enough.

It was Susie May. She was standing in the bar-room doorway, tapping her foot. And when Susie May taps her foot, look out.

"Susie May!" I choked. "Er—have a drink?"

She sauntered over. "I will not have a drink, you wolf in cheap clothing! Sitting here talking about other girls behind my back, right in front of my face. I heard you!"

She talked so fast she swallowed her gum.

"But, Susie! We were only talking about Cleopatra. You know *her!*"

Her eyes snapped fire.

"I sure do know about her! She's one of those burlesque queens down at the Folly Theayter on Main Street!"

She pulled me toward the door, tossing Mr. Wemple a look of scorn.

"Come away from that Hollywood smasher. He's a bad influence on you, Lem!"

"But—"

At the doorway, as she whirled me out, I clung to the edge of the bar, and yelled back,

"What was it the Doc said, Wemple? Quick!"

He looked up from his sixth beer, winked and nodded rakishly.

"Doc says to Brindell van Hastings, 'You've given me a marvelous idea! I'm going to build me a hideaway some place far away, and bring back some of them historical glamor gals—all for myself!'"

THE END.

A NEW USE FOR RATS

ACCORDING to the yearbook published by the United States Department of Agriculture, rats are very useful "test tubes" in which to test the value of foods to be consumed by humans. The reason given for this is that a rat's appetite is very similar to that of a human which also explains why rats prefer to live in homes rather than in the outdoors. The rat is also preferred to dogs, guinea pigs, and rabbits, all good food testers, since the rat is inexpensive. They require very little living space and can be fed for only 50c a year while a rabbit costs $4.50, and a dog $15.00.

Juggernaut Jones

When salesman Juggernaut Jones goes out to sell planes, he creates a market if it doesn't exist!

Juggernaut Jones grabbed a metal chair and swung it in a desperate attack against the octopus-like monster

EXPRESSMAN

by A. R. McKENZIE

SPACEGRAM To: V. Parker Jones, Sales Manager, Martian Division, Port Terrestrial, Mars:

No. No. No. Keep away from Martian Piscites. Refuse to authorize any such (deleted) *campaign as you suggest. Fate of Mars depends on Piscites' unhampered solution of most critical situation in planet's history. No market there, now or ever, even for Uneek Fliers' new 1½-ton, 26-jet hypo-magnesium stratoexpress. Uneek Fliers, Inc. approves my suggestion that you take three months' vacation with pay effective at once. Have arranged first-class passage for you on spaceliner, INTERVOID, leaving Port Terrestrial on maiden voyage to Altair Planetary System. This is an order. Leave Mars immediately. If you go within a thousand miles of Piscity, I'll kill you with my own bare hands.*

Harmon T. Dee,
Manager Interplanetary Sales, Uneek Fliers, Inc., New Chicago, Earth.

"Smart man—that boss of yours," Captain Smith said as he handed the message through the bars of the Space-queen's washroom door. "Only, knowing you as I do, Fatty, Altair wouldn't have been half far enough away." He opened the door. "We're over Piscity. I guess now we can safely let you out."

I emerged in haughty silence. For some reason, there exists among Mars' rowdier element, a conviction that I,

V. Parker Jones, the most resourceful and unappreciated salesman in the field of low-cost atmospheric planes, have an irresistible attraction for trouble. I concede that my recent campaign on Asteroid Aveston—in which I not only performed the stupendous feat of selling airplanes to birds but soundly whipped my bitterest rival, a Mr. Joe Karp of Globe Gliders, Inc.—was not without destructive qualities. But such were coincidental.

Certainly that, and Captain Smith's explanation of, "It may save us all a lot of grief" was no reason for me being held prisoner in the Spacequeen's washroom all during our flight from Port Terrestrial across the northern Oxidized deserts to the influential but extremely unsocial Piscites of Mars' polar regions.

"Your high-handedness," I said, "will be brought to the attention of authorities. As will the fact that I was refused passage on every ship but this monstrosity."

"And you know why," Captain Smith said. "You're dynamite, Juggernaut. Didn't you burn down a mountain on Quakerton, and burn up Aveston's entire monetary system, and bang up my space freighter so bad doing both that it's fit only for these stratosphere runs?"

"But I sold—"

"Blundering luck. Harmon T. should have had you jailed. With the Piscites working frantic twenty-four-and-a-half hour shifts, trying to keep Mars breathing, it's criminal to turn a bungler like you loose among 'em. That's Piscity below."

I immediately sensed foul play as I gazed down upon a glossy ocean, from which protruded three giant chimneys, and across the nearby southern coastline which was barren of life.

"Piscity?" I said darkly. "Where?"

Captain Smith groaned. "He's head of the entire Martian sales force but he doesn't know a thing about the most advanced race on the planet!"

THE statement, of course, was untrue. Since my position requires I keep abreast not only with late models such as Uneek's new 1½-ton stratoexpress but with all allied products such as the recently-marketed magnesium-fueled cigar lighter, I merely had not had the time to investigate the Piscites as thoroughly as is my custom among prospects.

I understood, naturally, that these reserved peoples had assumed the task of maintaining Mars' atmosphere and that lately they had encountered transportation difficulties. It was quite natural, considering that their assets listed not a single atmospheric plane or truck, that I immediately attempt to interest them in the finest product available—a Uneek Flier.

By selling them, I would aid Mars. The resultant publicity might regain the ground we had lost to our bitterest rival, Globe Gliders, in a previous competitive test on Glock Desert.

Although the incentive of competition would be lacking because the unscrupulous Mr. Joe Karp must certainly have perished when his crude repulser-ray Glider crashed on Aveston, the knowledge that the fate of Mars might rest upon my muscular shoulders more than filled this gap.

I had anticipated Harmon T.'s veto and had completed all arrangements before cabling him my intention. That he had attempted bribery to stop me—utilizing a three-month paid vacation plus passage to a distant system—confirmed my suspicions.

"That gentleman," I told Captain Smith, "is jealous. Uneek Fliers badly needs a far-sighted, virile representative such as I to head its New Chicago

office. But since he now stagnates in that position—".

"Water!" came a wild screech.

A man burst into the control room and flung his exceedingly thin but astonishingly familiar body for the washroom.

"Some blasted fool," he shouted, "left the water—Juggernaut!" he howled. "You did it. Smith, this crazy coot left the basin plug in. Water's been running down a seam behind the mirror. It's a foot deep in the fuel room and—yowie!" The Spacequeen shuddered as a stern rocket missed three beats. "It's starting. Every tube'll be damped out in two minutes."

Captain Smith moaned. "Only *he* could do it! Karp, I told you we were nuts to bring this fathead along. Nobody, not even us, could keep him from messing up the Piscites' work."

Mr. Joe Karp of Globe Gliders, Inc., had, obviously, survived the Aveston crash. The forward tubes suddenly blanked out and the Spacequeen started madly downward.

"A most diabolical plot," I said calmly as we rushed to our deaths. "You, Mr. Karp, brought me here to this secluded spot to hurl my broken body to an uncharted grave. You planned, then, to go on to the real Piscity and peddle your inferior product without fear of my proven ability to—"

"Oh, stop blubbering," Mr. Karp said. "There's no danger. This jalopy is still space-tight. She'll hold water."

I made a series of lightning calculations.

"I compute," I said, "that the Spacequeen will float at approximately five-eighths submerged."

Captain Smith frowned. "The shore's in gliding range."

"But a water landing would simplify contacts," Mr. Karp said. "We could watch Juggy better, too. With the rockets dead, there'll be no danger. Let's try it. This elephant may be right for once."

I REMAINED calm, ignoring even the slanderous remarks concerning my physical self. Following my suggestions, Captain Smith made a passable dead-rocket landing close to the projecting chimneys. We encountered only one obstruction as we plunged to the bottom. Coated with a peculiar unctuous fluid which seemed to permeate this northern sea, we crashed through a structure composed of coral slabs, liberating thousands of marble-sized red balls which promptly bubbled surfaceward to disintegrate with greasy pops upon striking sunlight.

We struck gently upon the sea bottom and the only water to enter our ship came as the space-lock doors were hurriedly opened and closed to admit a creature which immediately charged, waving hideous tentacles and glaring through dozens of green eyes sprinkled about its octopus-like body.

"Courage!" I shouted to my terrified companions and bludgeoned a chair down, sending our attacker twisting back in its death throes.

The space lock promptly disgorged a horde of these vile things. I was overpowered. Clammy tentacles convulsed about my throat, two steely clips fastened to my cheek bones and straightway a metallic voice began shrieking.

"Which one of you blasted humans slugged President Karlut?"

Captain Smith and Mr. Karp pointed fiendishly at me just as the Piscite, who had blundered under the chair I had been offering him, came erect on his tentacles.

"I've seen fat humans before," he said, his choked voice audible over the

bone-conducting vibratones these unsocial, amphibious Piscites use to converse with surface dwellers, "but if this isn't the fattest, funniest—ho, brother! Take him away before I go into another spasm. Who got the smart idea of smashing up our thrilium warehouse?"

I courageously assumed the responsibility—my decision in no way influenced by the fact that this underwater dignitary was already studying my sheet of figures on which was evident my slight miscalculation of computing earth density against Martian weights plus neglecting to add cargo tonnage consisting of a complete line of Mr. Karp's inferior repulser-ray Gliders and my own hypo-magnesium Uneek demonstrators.

"For a guy who couldn't punch his way through a mess of amoebas," President Karlut said, "the damage you can do is staggering."

"Damage?" I said soothingly. "Surely, a few red balls—"

"A few red balls, he says! He sends a ten years' reserve of thrilium oxide—the last ounce we can find in the mines below us—to be destroyed by sunlight, and then asks what damage? Lock him up, men, and spread the bad news. We'll have just about time to say our prayers before the Sea of Piscar is solid ice."

MY heated space suit performed admirably in the water-choked Piscity jail, and the bars of my isolation cell withstood even the most savage assault by my fellow prisoners.

The vibratones and a speech converter, inserted in the escape valve of my helmet, made conversation with the Piscites possible but not too pleasing. They continued threshing about the submerged lockup room in what, I quickly understood, was a vain effort to keep warm.

"Ten years' supply of thrilium," they kept chattering. "Last ball we could find in these southern mines. Gone! We've got a mere thirty hours' supply left in the compounding bins. When that runs out, the compounded gas stops pouring from the surface chimneys, the atmosphere thins, space cold creeps in and the Sea of Piscar goes as solid as your head. Hundreds of years we've been freezing ourselves and fouling our water with the hydrocarbons to keep the atmosphere up until you surface guys can find some way to crack the desert oxides. Now you wipe out everything."

They were, of course, delirious from cold. Not until I removed my glove to push my new cigar lighter in through my suit's chest outlet valve, did I realize how frigid their medium really was. Their instability of mind, however, was apparent directly after I lighted my cigar, though I did not immediately discover the reason for their maniacal charge upon my cell since I was momentarily facing death by suffocation from the smoke of one expensive Plantation Delight.

Not until I had hastily thrust the cigar through the outlet valve was I able to perceive it was the cigar lighter, not my predicament, which had produced the confusion.

"Heat!" they chattered.

I handed over the lighter, explaining as I did the qualities of my company's latest allied product, it being my custom never to overlook a possible sale.

"As you know," I said, "the fuel is identical with the high-octaned hypo-magnesium used in all our atmospheric Uneeks, even to our most recent model, a 1½-ton, 26-jet stratoexpress which has all controls and chambers hermetically sealed. And speaking of Uneeks, you are perhaps unaware that, whereas

our nearest competitor relies on antiquated, ground-contacting repulser rays for propulsion and is therefore extremely unwieldy over mountainous terrain and—ah—deep water, all late model Uneeks are able to soar above the most rugged country or deepest ocean without the slightest—"

"Oh, chop it off, Fatty," one said. "What on Mars would us fish want with an atmospheric plane! Just show us how this cigar lighter works."

Smiling at their ignorance of the fundamentals of combustion, I nevertheless flipped the control and was further amused at their surprise as the wick burst into flame.

They snatched the lighter and went paddling about the lockup, holding the flare joyfully to their tentacles, giving me an opportunity to weigh my situation. From my cell window, I looked down on roofless stores and weed-festooned streets crammed with confused Piscites. Many swam up to hurl unprintable epithets through my window, detracting slightly from my calm, analytical survey.

CONCISELY, I found I must accomplish two objectives: (1) gain an order for atmospheric planes from fish in sufficient volume to pacify jealous Harmon T. whose spacegram to the effect that I was once again discharged must even now be on my desk at Port Terrestrial. (2) Save Mars.

Difficult as that appeared, I found these further complications: (1) I was in jail, accused of assault and of destroying a ten years' supply of thrilium from which the Piscites compounded an atmosphere by a process no doubt elementary to a man of my background had I time to study it. (2) Mr. Karp was at large, engaged in making the first, all-important contacts.

My fine was impossible to compute.

"What you've done, Fatty," the magistrate said, "is to destroy centuries of Piscite progress, to say nothing of the other Martian races."

"Fiddlesticks," I said, "you need only to mine more thrilium, or substitute another element."

The judge made a feeble attempt to puncture a large yellow globule which had bubbled up from the floor beside his desk.

"Element?" he gurgled. "Substitute? Blubberface, do you know where this thrilium originally came from?"

"Naturally."

"Naturally, my tentacle! Thrilium, half-wit, is a lightweight metallic substance, impossible to scale, but which, in a chloridic solution, liberates a startling amount of gas similar to the upper atmosphere. These tiny red balls are found in just two huge meteoric fragments below the hydrocarbon strata. You know what thrilium is?"

"Certainly."

"Amazing. Us Piscites haven't even figured it out yet. We believe thrilium to be a substance compounded by the lost race of Planet Five—the planet which exploded into the Asteroid Belt. As I say, two fragments hit Mars. We control both. One here directly beneath us; the other far to the north in waters much too cold for us to endure. To reach and exhaust this southern deposit below us, we had to blast far below the hydrocarbon strata, thus polluting our water with the crudes."

"Then you've exhausted this southern fragment?"

"You catch on fast."

"But the northern deposit?"

The judge shivered. "Only one suicide squad was able to penetrate that frigid area. Before its members died, they managed to mine and cache a few odd tons. However, a rough survey reveals enough unmined thrilium

there to last Mars a thousand more years. But we have no way of transporting the ore in the volume we need, even if we *could* work the deposit."

THE solution was childish. But before I spoke the words which would not only save Mars but gain me the deluge of orders I needed to satisfy Harmon T., I ventured one more question.

"This thrilium," I asked, recalling the reactions which occurred when my hypo-magnesium blasts contacted other unknown materials, "will it burn?"

"Thrilium," the judge said, "positively will not burn, explode, ignite or oxidize under any condition or in any medium."

"Then," I said, "you will purchase from my company—at a reasonable discount if in sufficient volume—a supply of hypo-magnesium rocket tubes. You will ignite these along your ocean bottom and raise the temperature of your medium to a point where you may mine the northern waters in comfort."

"A capital suggestion," the judge admitted. "To raise our ocean's temperature one degree, we would require about forty-seven million more rocket tubes than your stupid company could manufacture in as many years. Further, thanks to you, we have less than thirty hours to do it in. And finally, there is the small matter of fast delivery. With the mines directly under our compounders, it took us sixty years to accumulate the reserve you destroyed. Now that our only other available supply is hundreds of miles away, even you should see the trouble we'd have keeping the compounders rolling day-to-day—providing, by some miracle, that frigid area can be mined.

"Being unable to compute your fine, the court assesses you one cigar lighter and hopes some less kindly fool breaks your fool neck."

I found President Karlut in the compounding building's tap room, drowning his troubles in shots of concentrated oxygen. Mr. Karp, in suit, was clinging to the Piscite's weakest tentacle.

Captain Smith, I learned, had remained aboard the Spacequeen to estimate his damages—another factor I must consider, for Captain Smith was, as I had previously discovered, a very mercenary individual who insisted on moneys due him or the equivalent in man-hours worked in potato-peeling bondage.

"You've got nearly thirty hours, Mr. Karlut," Mr. Karp was shouting. "You've also got enough thrilium cached up north to hold you a couple months—time enough to start mining—providing you can obtain some quick means of transporting that two months' supply."

"Providing," President Karlut hiccupped.

"But I can supply that," Mr. Karp cried. "Picture it: a sleek, shining new water-proof Glider express. Hundreds, all boasting a full 2-ton capacity; all hurling their powerful rays against the sea bottom, gaining added drive from the thicker medium, as they speed about their under-water job of world-salvation."

Mr. Karp's unscrupulousness will never be better illustrated. Consider the facts: I had, in the Spacequeen, one new 1½-ton, 26-jet stratoexpress demonstrator. In jail, I had proven that a hypo-magnesium flare will operate under water. From the judge, I had drawn the facts, concerning the transportation troubles which had brought me to Piscity.

LEAVING court, I had rushed for President Karlut, to find Mr. Karp

screaming out my plan. I attached myself to President Karlut's nearest tentacle.

"Since," I said kindly, "I originated the idea, I feel it my duty to recommend the proper ship. A revolutionary new 26-jet Uneek; a ship, daring to sacrifice tonnage for power; a job guaranteed to out-speed and out-pull all competing products; a water-heating masterpiece completely justifying its slightly higher cost by its ability to maintain flight above the deepest—"

"May I impress one fact upon you two bums," President Karlut interrupted, dragging us into the compounding room. "Transportation or no, there isn't a Piscite miner swimming who can survive the northern cold. Neither is there a surface creature, even in a suit, able to take the terrific pressure below the hydrocarbons." He guided us to a large bin. "The two months' supply cached up north and the thrilium right here is our last."

"In this bin?" I asked.

The door catch was faulty. In no other way could that door have suddenly popped open and sent the last remaining thrilium ball, together with a number of odd fatty globules, flying upward to destruction.

"I won't kill you, Fatty," President Karlut said. "That would be too much pleasure for one man to enjoy in these sorrowful times. You, however, are going to climb into your pop-buggy, go north and express back a load of thrilium equal to the amount you have just destroyed. And I hope you freeze your—"

"A splendid idea," Mr. Karp cried. "We'll *both* bring back a load. A perfect test for the respective merits of our product—the winner, naturally, to receive the order which may save Mars."

As we unshipped our craft, Captain Smith showed me a column of discouraging figures.

"A complete cleaning and refueling job," he said, "plus derricks and men to beach the Spacequeen. Sell good, Baldy, else it's back to skinning potatoes for you."

Both expresses proved sea-worthy. I left Piscity at reduced speed, experimenting with various maneuvers so, when the crisis arrived as it must, I would be prepared. However, President Karlut, who had decided to ride with me part way, grew annoyed.

"You are now," he said, "heading straight towards the bottom. I'd say your ship, strangely enough, *is* the fastest and most powerful—if you could only run it. That lever fires the topside rocket bank, idiot; you pull it now and we'll take a loop."

"Ridiculous," I said and pulled.

Cleverly righting the ship, I was startled to find several young Piscites paddling along outside, enjoying the hypo-mag blasts.

"They'll be killed!" I cried and reached for the throttle only to find it already full on.

PRESIDENT KARLUT groaned. "If that's your top speed, we're licked. Fat, even if the northern deposit *was* mineable, we compute we'd need a thousand 5-ton transports, working twenty-four and a half hour shifts at better than one hundred miles an hour to keep us going. You're making 15 miles per. At that rate, the combined flier companies of the system couldn't supply us. Open those doors, Baldy; I'm getting out here."

Mr. Karp, shivering in a cold which penetrated even our heated suits, watched me load the sealed cases of thrillium.

"Your ship *is* fast and punchy," he admitted. "Too bad you can't operate

it. Now we'll run this contest fair and square. When I count three, we go."

Mr. Karp, of course, was hiding a broken heart. Even he had conceded my superior speed and power. And since such would be key factors, his defeat was certain.

Knowing Mr. Karp's flare for trickery, I yanked back the starting lever the instant he wigwagged "two," and went thundering backward just as he shot forward. Making a lightning calculation, I flipped the proper control. Both doors of the space lock flew open and a great deal of water, plus a discouraging amount of debris churned from the bottom by Mr. Karp's backward-thrusting repulsers, poured upon me.

Having removed my space suit, death by drowning seemed not at all unlikely.

However, in emergencies, my rapidity of thought is astounding. I played *all* the levers. The doors snapped shut, checking the deluge. It was then a simple matter to back the stratoexpress out of the mine shaft and send it flying after Mr. Karp's inferior Glider.

My calmness in remaining at my post, waist deep in icy water, was characteristic. I had a race to win, reward or no. That my ship was proven superior and would certainly win by miles was purely coincidental.

I raised Mr. Karp's sluggish Glider about mid-race. Sounding a warning blast with my forward rockets, I yanked the throttle full on, preparatory to roaring past my arch enemy to victory. Quite abruptly, I found myself upside down, head submerged, racing top speed to the rear.

"Strange," I thought.

Making necessary corrections, I again attempted to shoot ahead only to find myself progressing sideways in a series of most annoying rolls. A third passing effort resulted in my ship driving its nose far into the murk of the ocean floor.

"Foul play," I decided instantly.

By focusing a portion of his many propelling rays upon an imaginary spot in the fluid directly behind him, Mr. Karp was creating backwashes and cross-currents powerful enough to have floundered a battleship.

EVERY way I turned, there was Mr. Karp, fiendishly churning the waters into course-tangling tempests. Even when I rose to a point where the sunlight could be seen shimmering off the tacky waste materials which the Piscites had released in mining, Mr. Karp preceded me. Although his lifting repulsers failed to hoist him to my altitude, the barrage from his topside tubes whipped the lighter upper levels about so viciously any passing thrust therein would have been akin to suicide.

"The crisis," I said.

The spheres Mr. Karp was expressing would assure the Piscites—and Mars—a suspension of the death sentence. By winning, he would land a discouragingly large order, and by expressing the rest of the pre-mined thrilium, thus extending Mars' period of life expectancy approximately two months, his company would gain system-wide fame—and more orders.

It was entirely possible that, during those two months, a method might be found to insulate the Piscites, or to heat their medium so the northern deposits could be mined. In those same two months, Globe Gliders might likewise devise a ship capable of navigating this medium at the necessary speed.

If both premises were successful—and Mars was promised another thousand years of atmosphere—Mr. Karp's company would, obviously, monopolize the transportation field. Uneek's agencies would fold and my office as Planet

Manager would no longer be available to anyone.

I would not, however, be jobless. Captain Smith, my creditor, would see that I did not lack potatoes to whittle.

"Frightful," I admitted.

Not until I discovered myself stretching to keep my nose above the cabin's water level did I realize still another complication had set in. Obviously, as the air locks had closed, a bit of debris had become lodged in the door cracks, allowing a disastrous seepage.

I debated a death by drowning. Would it help my company?

"Decidedly not," I concluded.

I must then leave the field, rendered hors de combat. Sadly, I pointed my ship's nose upward only to find that Mr. Karp, apparently, had been anticipating such a maneuver.

Every spare ray he possessed was churning the murky liquids above me and. although I even tried reverse, each attempt to gain the surface threw me out of control.

Catching breaths haphazardly, I hurled my brain into action. Speed superiority had been proven. But not power. With my face against the cabin ceiling to steal the last scant inch of air remaining, I drove my ship up squarely against the focal point of Mr. Karp's water-rending rays.

POWER against power. The supreme test. My Uneek shuddered at the contact, then slowly swung to face the bitter challenge, head-on. A breathless instant passed while both ships seemed to be girding their loins, then—

I rammed the throttle home at the very instant I felt Mr. Karp's invisible rays kick madly back against my hull. All my jets thundered. Bow plates buckled in protest. Waters churned. Then, my peerless craft moved forward, slowly at first, then faster and faster until, with a masterful side-slip and roll, I flung those blocking rays off and down.

Mr. Karp's Glider spun for the depths as I zoomed upward to crash the surface into glorious sunlight. My ship leaped joyfully as it ripped free of the cloying liquid. Like broken shackles, the fluids spun in every direction, hissing under the blinding white rocket blasts. I played all levers, and as the water cascaded from the cabin, I leveled off and went roaring on for Piscity's three chimneys.

I had been driven from the field. Through circumstances beyond my control, my company would suffer an inestimable loss in prestige. Mr. Karp would quickly right his vessel and drive on to fame and fortune. Fickle Mars would rush to purchase an inferior product and destroy my future.

But I still doggedly refused to admit defeat.

I glanced at the speedometer. It registered three hundred and eighty miles an hour—with the throttle only half on. My agile brain leaped into action. Since we had not been restricted to ocean travel, this plunge into a less dense medium had proven my salvation. I would win. The failure of Mr. Karp's repulsers to find adequate footing would keep his Glider well below the surface, never to approach this speed.

Even more: a fleet of Uneeks could dart from the ocean directly above the northern mines into the thin upper levels.

Mars would yet be saved—if the mines could be worked.

How far was the run? I looked back and my last fears of a Globe Glider landslide of sales to these Piscites—or, for that matter, to the combined civilizations of Mars—vanished. Mr. Karp would not be able to inflict his inferior product upon the Martians.

For there would be no Martians.

I understood as quickly the identity of the waste materials, variously referred to as crudes, unctuous fluids and hydrocarbons. To mine the thrilium, the Piscites had blasted below the hydrocarbon strata, thus liberating countless gallons of petroleum, a valueless, little-known product in this age of magnesium fuels and chloridic lubricants.

Since their environment prevented any effective disposal, and because they had other means of aerating their medium, the Piscites had allowed the crude oils, evidence of which I had seen in Piscity, to spread throughout the Sea of Piscar.

My hypo-magnesium blasts had ignited this highly inflammable fluid with the result that the ocean was now an inferno. The Piscites' aloofness was explained. The danger of a visitor's rocket exhaust firing their homeland was too great.

I DROPPED my sealed cases of thrilium through the mounting flames but, before fleeing for Port Terrestrial, I made a last intensive survey, recalling that, often in the past, I was able to turn seeming disaster into triumph.

I had won the race, bested Mr. Karp and established the superiority of my product. I had solved the Piscites' transportation problem. A fleet of Uneeks could easily handle the volume of thrilium needed to keep the compounders at their business of bolstering the thinning atmosphere of Mars.

But only Piscites could mine the thrilium.

And, quite obviously, there would be no Piscites.

They were below me now, hundreds upon thousands, writhing their terrible agonies in the ghastly conflagration. Time and again, I saw white bellies flash and as suddenly disappear as the fishmen convulsed their tenacles about their charring bodies and sank one-by-one from sight.

But infinitely worse: I saw the flames begin eating deeper and deeper into that oil-impregnated sea, and I knew it would only be a matter of time before the entire area, top to bottom, would be a boiling, blazing, steaming caldron in which not one living thing could hope for salvation.

Piscity, its peoples, their secret compounders—even the remote mines—would vanish forever in that crematory.

On my desk at Port Terrestrial, I found two delayed communications. One contained credit slips and a ticket, assigning me first-class passage on the spaceliner, INTERVOID, leaving within the hour on its maiden voyage for the planetary system of distant Altair.

Since the time seemed right for me to embark upon a well-earned three months' vacation with pay, I refrained from opening the second communication, and even a third which was handed me as I climbed nimbly up the INTERVOID'S gangplank, until we had reached a point far out in space.

The second message, to my great surprise, was a delayed notice stating that my campaign among the Piscites was a direct violation of a company order and, as a result, I was being unconditionally and gratefully removed for all time from the payroll.

The third communication, obviously composed after the campaign, was likewise from Harmon T. Dee, Manager of Interplanetary Sales, and it read,

Suggest you consult early earthen history (Mesopotamia—3200 B. C.) regarding properties of petroleum. Lighter, insoluble crudes still burning on Sea of Piscar. Water below being heated to livable temperature. Piscites, after brief hysterical period of warming selves, starting compounders with your

thrilium and dispatching crack mining squads to northern deposits. Due to deluge of rush orders from overjoyed Piscites, fleet of new 6-ton, 80-jet Uneek stratoexpresses soon to pour off assembly lines. Mr. Karp long overdue and believed lost. Captain Smith being cabled full expenses. All Martian agencies being swamped with orders. Disregard previous spacegram. Offering you newly created office of Field Manager of Intersystem Sales at reasonable increase in salary. Complete line of Uneek demonstrators following you to Altair on first freighter. Happy sales and oceans of love, you (deleted) *firebug!*

Harmon T.

HAVE A DATE

By WILLIS WHITE

Nature made a mistake when she made the date tree and science has had to step in and fix things up!

THE date-grower is the only agriculturist who has to serve as match-maker for his crop. Nature created palms of two sexes, male and female, but she forgot to assign the task of pollination to an insect and so man must take over the job. The growers perform the task in two ways: one is to dust the female blooms with powder puffs of pollen and the other is to tie a sprig of male blossoms among the female buds.

The entire problem of date culture is very complex. Dates grown from seed are never true to type and so this method is seldom used.

When the male and female palms are five years old, they proceed to raise a family. The female produces from ten to twenty daughter offshoots and the male produces ten to twenty son offshoots. This goes on for about ten to fifteen years and then the palms stop producing offshoots, but do continue to bear fruit for at least another two hundred years or more.

It seems that the palms were created to be a trouble-maker for their growers. The bunches of dates will not ripen all at once like a bunch of grapes, but require that the picker examine each bunch about twenty-five times during the harvesting season to pick the dates that have ripened between visits. And then there is the problem of growing. The palm tree often grows as high as one hundred feet, which makes the cost of ladders needed to reach the dates too expensive. The grower, therefore, has to remove a palm tree if it exceeds fifty feet.

The date-growing industry in the United States is centered in the Coachella and Imperial Valleys of California, the Salt River, Yuma, and Cosa Grande valleys of Arizona. Thirty years ago these valleys produced only .0001 per cent of the dates sold in this country. Today these same valleys produce about twelve per cent of our needs and the growers are looking to the day when the United States will be self-sufficient in date production.

The usual arrangement of a palm grove is to space the palms thirty feet apart with fifty female palms planted for each male palm. The palm trees do not produce any dates until they are about six years old and for six years the grower must watch his palms and care for them without any income. But, once they start to produce they will continue way past his lifetime.

One major problem for the grower is to protect his date crop from rain and the effects of a high humidity during the harvesting season. If any moisture forms on the date during this season, the ripening dates will break through their thin skins, which causes the formation of a mold, and the date becomes worthless. Therefore, just before the harvesting season begins in September, the growers go around and put a paper covering on all the date clusters to protect them until the harvesting is completed in January.

Since the date is about seventy-five per cent sugar, it is often eaten as a candy substitute and this use will have added importance if the manufacture of candy is curtailed by the sugar rationing. Moreover, the date is not only delicious, but it is very healthful.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH—A GREAT NEW NOVEL
"WARRIOR OF THE DAWN"
By Howard Browne
A Sensational Serial That Will Have You Talking for Years!

Raymond Z. Gallun

THE ETERNAL WALL

by RAYMOND Z. GALLUN

"SEE you in half an hour, Betty," said Ned Vince over the party telephone. "We'll be out at the Silver Basket before ten-thirty. . . ."

Ned Vince was eager for the company of the girl he loved. That was why he was in a hurry to get to the neighboring town of Hurley, where she lived. His old car rattled and roared as he swung it recklessly around Pit Bend.

There was where Death tapped him on the shoulder. Another car leaped suddenly into view, its lights glaring blindingly past a high, upjutting mass of Jurassic rock at the turn of the road.

Dazzled, and befuddled by his own rash speed, Ned Vince had only swift young reflexes to rely on to avoid a fearful, telescoping collision. He flicked his wheel smoothly to the right; but the County Highway Commission hadn't yet tarred the traffic-loosened gravel at the Bend.

Ned could scarcely have chosen a worse place to start sliding and spinning. His car hit the white-painted wooden rail sideways, crashed through, tumbled down a steep slope, struck a huge boulder, bounced up a little, and

A scream of brakes, the splash into icy water, a long descent into alkaline depths . . . it was death. But Ned Vince lived again a million years later!

With amazing science they removed the body from its rock prison

arced outward, falling as gracefully as a swan-diver toward the inky waters of the Pit, fifty feet beneath. . . .

Ned Vince was still dimly conscious when that black, quiet pool gysered around him in a mighty splash. He had only a dazing welt on his forehead, and a gag of terror in his throat.

Movement was slower now, as he began to sink, trapped inside his wrecked car. Nothing that he could imagine could mean doom more certainly than this. The Pit was a tremendously deep pocket in the ground, spring-fed. The edges of that almost bottomless pool were caked with a rim of white—for the water, on which dead birds so often floated, was surcharged with alkali. As that heavy, natronous liquid rushed up through the openings and cracks beneath his feet, Ned Vince knew that his friends and his family would never even see his body again, lost beyond recovery in this abyss.

The car was deeply submerged. The light had blinked out on the dash-panel, leaving Ned in absolute darkness. A flood rushed in at the shattered window. He clawed at the door, trying to open it, but it was jammed in the crash-bent frame, and he couldn't fight against the force of that incoming water. The welt, left by the blow he had received on his forehead, put a thickening mist over his brain, so that he could not think clearly. Presently, when he could no longer hold his breath, bitter liquid was sucked into his lungs.

His last thoughts were those of a drowning man. The machine-shop he and his dad had had in Harwich. Betty Moore, with the smiling Irish eyes—like in the song. Betty and he had planned to go to the State University this Fall. They'd planned to be married sometime. . . . Goodbye, Betty. . . .

The ripples that had ruffled the surface waters in the Pit, quieted again to glassy smoothness. The eternal stars shone calmly. The geologic Dakota hills, which might have seen the dinosaurs, still bulked along the highway. Time, the Brother of Death, and the Father of Change, seemed to wait. . . .

"KAALLEEE! Tik! . . . Tik, tik, tik! . . . . Kaalleee! . . ."

The excited cry, which no human throat could quite have duplicated accurately, arose thinly from the depths of a powder-dry gulch, water-scarred from an inconceivable antiquity. The noonday Sun was red and huge. The air was tenuous, dehydrated, chill.

"Kaalleee! . . . Tik, tik, tik! . . ."

At first there was only one voice uttering t h o s e weird, triumphant sounds. Then other vocal organs took up that trilling wail, and those short, sharp chuckles of eagerness. Other questioning, wondering notes mixed with the cadence. Lacking qualities identifiable as human, the disturbance was still like the babble of a group of workmen who have discovered something remarkable.

The desolate expanse around the gulch, was all but without motion. The icy breeze tore tiny puffs of dust from grotesque, angling drifts of soil, nearly waterless for eons. Patches of drab lichen grew here and there on the up-jutting rocks, but in the desert itself, no other life was visible. Even the hills had sagged away, flattened by incalculable ages of erosion.

At a mile distance, a crumbling heap of rubble arose. Once it had been a building. A gigantic, jagged mass of detritus slanted upward from its crest —red debris that had once been steel. A launching catapult for the last space ships built by the gods in exodus, per-

haps it was—half a million years ago. Man was gone from the Earth. Glacial ages, war, decadence, disease, and a final scattering of those ultimate superhumans to newer worlds in other solar systems, had done that.

"Kaalleee! . . . Tik, tik, tik! . . ." The sounds were not human. They were more like the chatter and wail of small desert animals.

But there was a seeming paradox here in the depths of that gulch, too. The glint of metal, sharp and burnished. The flat, streamlined bulk of a flying machine, shiny and new. The bell-like muzzle of a strange excavator-apparatus, which seemed to depend on a blast of atoms to clear away rock and soil. Thus the gulch had been cleared of the accumulated rubbish of antiquity. Man, it seemed, had a successor, as ruler of the Earth.

Loy Chuk had flown his geological expedition out from the far lowlands to the east, out from the city of Kar-Rah. And he was very happy now—flushed with a vast and unlooked-for success.

He crouched there on his haunches, at the dry bottom of the Pit. The breeze rumpled his long, brown fur. He wasn't very different in appearance from his ancestors. A foot tall, perhaps, as he squatted there in that antique stance of his kind. His tail was short and furred, his undersides creamy. White whiskers spread around his inquisitive, pink-tipped snout.

But his cranium bulged up and forward between shrewd, beady eyes, betraying the slow heritage of time, of survival of the fittest, of evolution. He could think and dream and invent, and the civilization of his kind was already far beyond that of the ancient Twentieth Century.

Loy Chuk and his fellow workers were gathered, tense and gleeful, around the things their digging had exposed to the daylight. There was a gob of junk—scarcely more than an irregular formation of flaky rust. But imbedded in it was a huddled form, brown and hard as old wood. The dry mud that had encased it like an air-tight coffin, had by now been chipped away by the tiny investigators; but soiled clothing still clung to it, after perhaps a million years. Metal had gone into decay—yes. But not this body. The answer to this was simple—alkali. A mineral saturation that had held time and change in stasis. A perfect preservative for organic tissue, aided probably during most of those passing eras by desert dryness. The Dakotas had turned arid very swiftly. This body was not a mere fossil. It was a mummy.

"KAALLEEE!" Man, that meant. Not the star-conquering demi-gods, but the ancestral stock that had built the first machines on Earth, and in the early Twenty-first Century, the first interplanetary rockets. No wonder Loy Chuk and his co-workers were happy in their paleontological enthusiasm! A strange accident, happening in a legendary antiquity, had aided them in their quest for knowledge.

At last Loy Chuk gave a soft, chirping signal. The chant of triumph ended, while instruments flicked in his tiny hands. The final instrument he used to test the mummy, looked like a miniature stereoscope, with complicated details. He held it over his eyes. On the tiny screen within, through the agency of focussed X-rays, he saw magnified images of the internal organs of this ancient human corpse.

What his probing gaze revealed to him, made his pleasure even greater than before. In twittering, chattering sounds, he communicated his further

knowledge to his henchmen. Though devoid of moisture, the mummy was perfectly preserved, even to its brain cells! Medical and biological sciences were far advanced among Loy Chuk's kind. Perhaps, by the application of principles long known to them, this long-dead body could be made to live again! It might move, speak, remember its past! What a marvelous subject for study it would make, back there in the museums of Kar-Rah!

"Tik, tik, tik! . . ."

But Loy silenced this fresh, eager chattering with a command. Work was always more substantial than cheering.

With infinite care—small, sharp hand-tools were used, now—the mummy of Ned Vince was disengaged from the worthless rust of his primitive automobile. With infinite care it was crated in a metal case, and hauled into the flying machine.

Flashing flame, the latter arose, bearing the entire hundred members of the expedition. The craft shot eastward at bullet-like speed. The spreading continental plateau of North America seemed to crawl backward, beneath. A tremendous, sad desert, marked with low, washed-down mountains, and the vague, angular, geometric mounds of human cities that were gone forever.

Beyond the eastern rim of the continent, the plain dipped downward steeply. The white of dried salt was on the hills, but there was a little green growth here, too. The dead sea-bottom of the vanished Atlantic was not as dead as the highlands.

Far out in a deep valley, Kar-Rah, the city of the rodents, came into view—a crystalline maze of low, bubble-like structures, glinting in the red sunshine. But this was only its surface aspect. Loy Chuk's people had built their homes mostly underground, since the beginning of their foggy evolution. Besides, in this latter day, the nights were very cold, the shelter of subterranean passages and rooms was welcome.

The mummy was taken to Loy Chuk's laboratory, a short distance below the surface. Here at once, the scientist began his work. The body of the ancient man was put in a large vat. Fluids submerged it, slowly soaking from that hardened flesh the alkali that had preserved it for so long. The fluid was changed often, until woody muscles and other tissues became pliable once more.

Then the more delicate processes began. Still submerged in liquid, the corpse was submitted to a flow of restorative energy, passing between complicated electrodes. The cells of antique flesh and brain gradually took on a chemical composition nearer to that of the life that they had once known.

AT LAST the final liquid was drained away, and the mummy lay there, a mummy no more, but a pale, silent figure in its tatters of clothing. Loy Chuk put an odd, metal-fabric helmet on its head, and a second, much smaller helmet on his own. Connected with this arrangement, was a black box of many uses. For hours he worked with his apparatus, studying, and guiding the recording instruments.

At last, eager and ready for whatever might happen now, Loy Chuk pushed another switch. With a cold, rosy flare, energy blazed around that moveless form.

For Ned Vince, timeless eternity ended like a gradually fading mist. When he could see clearly again, he experienced that inevitable shock of vast change around him. Though it had been dehydrated, his brain had been kept perfectly intact through the ages, and now it was restored. So his memories were as vivid as yesterday.

Yet, through that crystalline vat in which he lay, he could see a broad, low room, in which he could barely have stood erect. He saw instruments and equipment whose weird shapes suggested alienness, and knowledge beyond the era he had known! The walls were lavender and phosphorescent. Fossil bone-fragments were mounted in shallow cases. Dinosaur bones, some of them seemed, from their size. But there was a complete skeleton of a dog, too, and the skeleton of a man, and a second man-skeleton that was not quite human. Its neck-vertebrae were very thick and solid, its shoulders were wide, and its skull was gigantic.

All this weirdness had a violent effect on Ned Vince—a sudden, nostalgic panic. Something was fearfully wrong!

The nervous terror of the unknown was on him. Feeble and dizzy after his weird resurrection, which he could not understand, remembering as he did that moment of sinking to certain death in the pool at Pit Bend, he caught the edge of the transparent vat, and pulled himself to a sitting posture. There was a muffled murmur around him, as of some vast, un-Earthly metropolis.

"Take it easy, Ned Vince. . . ."

The words themselves, and the way they were assembled, were old, familiar friends. But the tone was wrong. It was high, shrill, parrot-like, and mechanical. Ned's gaze searched for the source of the voice—located the black box just outside of his crystal vat. From that box the voice seemed to have originated. Before it crouched a small, brownish animal with a bulging head. The animal's tiny-fingered paws—hands they were, really—were touching rows of keys.

To Ned Vince, it was all utterly insane and incomprehensible. A rodent, looking like a prairie-dog, a little; but plainly possessing a high order of intelligence. And a voice whose soothingly familiar words were more repugnant somehow, simply because they could never belong in a place as eerie as this.

Ned Vince did not know how Loy Chuk had probed his brain, with the aid of a pair of helmets, and the black box apparatus. He did not know that in the latter, his language, taken from his own revitalized mind, was recorded, and that Loy Chuk had only to press certain buttons to make the instrument express his thoughts in common, long-dead English. Loy, whose vocal organs were not human, would have had great difficulty speaking English words, anyway.

Ned's dark hair was wildly awry. His gaunt, young face held befuddled terror. He gasped in the thin atmosphere. "I've gone nuts," he pronounced with a curious calm. "Stark—starin' —nuts. . . ."

LOY'S box, with its recorded English words and its sonic detectors, could translate for its master, too. As the man spoke, Loy read the illuminated symbols in his own language, flashed on a frosted crystal plate before him. Thus he knew what Ned Vince was saying.

Loy Chuk pressed more keys, and the box reproduced his answer: "No, Ned, not nuts. Not a bit of it! There are just a lot of things that you've got to get used to, that's all. You drowned about a million years ago. I discovered your body. I brought you back to life. We have science that can do that. I'm Loy Chuk. . . ."

It took only a moment for the box to tell the full story in clear, bold, friendly terms. Thus Loy sought, with calm, human logic, to make his charge feel at home. Probably, though, he was a fool, to suppose that he could succeed, thus.

Vince started to mutter, struggling desperately to reason it out. "A prairie dog," he said. "Speaking to me. One million years. Evolution. The scientists say that people grew up from fishes in the sea. Prairie dogs are smart. So maybe super-prairie-dogs could come from them. A lot easier than men from fish. . . ."

It was all sound logic. Even Ned Vince knew that. Still, his mind, tuned to ordinary, simple things, couldn't quite realize all the vast things that had happened to himself, and to the world. The scope of it all was too staggeringly big. One million years. God! . . . .

Ned Vince made a last effort to control himself. His knuckles tightened on the edge of the vat. "I don't know what you've been talking about," he grated wildly. "But I want to get out of here! I want to go back where I came from! Do you understand—whoever, or whatever you are?"

Loy Chuk pressed more keys. "But you can't go back to the Twentieth Century," said the box. "Nor is there any better place for you to be now, than Kar-Rah. You are the only man left on Earth. Those men that exist in other star systems are not really your kind anymore, though their forefathers originated on this planet. They have gone far beyond you in evolution. To them you would be only a senseless curiosity. You are much better off with my people—our minds are much more like yours. We will take care of you, and make you comfortable. . . ."

But Ned Vince wasn't listening, now. "You are the only man left on Earth." That had been enough for him to hear. He didn't more than half believe it. His mind was too confused for conviction about anything. Everything he saw and felt and heard might be some kind of nightmare. But then it might all be real instead, and that was abysmal horror. Ned was no coward—death and danger of any ordinary Earthly kind, he could have faced bravely. But the loneliness here, and the utter strangeness, were hideous, like being stranded alone on another world!

His heart was pounding heavily, and his eyes were wide. He looked across this eerie room. There was a ramp there at the other side, leading upward in place of a stairway. Fierce impulse to escape this nameless lair, and to try to learn the facts for himself, possessed him. He bounded out of the vat, and with head down, dashed for the ramp.

HE had to go most of the way on his hands and knees, for the upslanting passage was low. Excited animal chucklings around him, and the occasional touch of a furry body, hurried his feverish scrambling. But he emerged at last at the surface.

He stood there panting in that frigid, rarefied air. It was night. The Moon was a gigantic, pockmarked bulk. The constellations were unrecognizable. The rodent city was a glowing expanse of shallow, crystalline domes, set among odd, scrub trees and bushes. The crags loomed on all sides, all their jaggedness lost after a million years of erosion under an ocean that was gone. In that ghastly moonlight, the ground glistened with dry salt.

"Well, I guess it's all true, huh?" Ned Vince muttered in a flat tone.

Behind him he heard an excited, squeaky chattering. Rodents in pursuit. Looking back, he saw the pinpoint gleams of countless little eyes. Yes, he might as well be an exile on another planet—so changed had the Earth become.

A wave of intolerable homesickness came over him as he sensed the distances of time that had passed—those

inconceivable eons, separating himself from his friends, from Betty, from almost everything that was familiar. He started to run, away from those glittering rodent eyes. He sensed death in that cold sea-bottom, but what of it? What reason did he have left to live? He'd be only a museum piece here, a thing to be caged and studied. . . .

Prison or a madhouse would be far better. He tried to get hold of his courage. But what was there to inspire it? Nothing! He laughed harshly as he ran, welcoming that bitter, killing cold. Nostalgia had him in its clutch, and there was no answer in this hell-world, lost beyond the barrier of the years. . . .

LOY CHUK and his following presently came upon Ned Vince's unconscious form, a mile from the city of Kar-Rah. In a flying machine they took him back, and applied stimulants. He came to, in the same laboratory room as before. But he was firmly strapped to a low platform this time, so that he could not escape again. There he lay, helpless, until presently an idea occurred to him. It gave him a few crumbs of hope.

"Hey, somebody!" he called.

"You'd better get some rest, Ned Vince," came the answer from the black box. It was Loy Chuk speaking again.

"But listen!" Ned protested. "You know a lot more than we did in the Twentieth Century. And — well — there's that thing called time-travel, that I used to read about. Maybe you know how to make it work! Maybe you could send me back to my own time after all!"

Little Loy Chuk was in a black, discouraged mood, himself. He could understand the utter, sick dejection of this giant from the past, lost from his own kind. Probable insanity looming. In far less extreme circumstances than this, death from homesickness had come.

Loy Chuk was a scientist. In common with all real scientists, regardless of the species from which they spring, he loved the subjects of his researches. He wanted this ancient man to live and to be happy. Or this creature would be of scant value for study.

So Loy considered carefully what Ned Vince had suggested. Time-travel. Almost a legend. An assault upon an intangible wall that had baffled far keener wits than Loy's. But he was bent, now, on the well-being of this anachronism he had so miraculously resurrected — this human, this Kaalleee. . . .

Loy jabbed buttons on the black box. "Yes, Ned Vince," said the sonic apparatus. "Time-travel. Perhaps that is the only thing to do—to send you back to your own period of history. For I see that you will never be yourself, here. It will be hard to accomplish, but we'll try. Now I shall put you under an anesthetic. . . ."

Ned felt better immediately, for there was real hope now, where there had been none before. Maybe he'd be back in his home-town of Harwich again. Maybe he'd see the old machine-shop, there. And the trees greening out in Spring. Maybe he'd be seeing Betty Moore in Hurley, soon. . . . Ned relaxed, as a tiny hypo-needle bit into his arm. . . .

As soon as Ned Vince passed into unconsciousness, Loy Chuk went to work once more, using that pair of brain-helmets again, exploring carefully the man's mind. After hours of research, he proceeded to prepare his plans. The government of Kar-Rah was a scientific oligarchy, of which Loy was a prime member. It would be easy to get the help he needed.

A horde of small, grey-furred beings and their machines, toiled for many days, on a level area just outside the city.

NED VINCE'S mind swam gradually out of the blur that had enveloped it. He was wandering aimlessly about in a familiar room. The girders of the roof above were of red-painted steel. His tool-benches were there, greasy and littered with metal filings, just as they had always been. He had a tractor to repair, and a seed-drill. Outside of the machine-shop, the old, familiar yellow sun was shining. Across the street was the small brown house, where he lived.

With a sudden startlement, he saw Betty Moore in the doorway. She wore a blue dress, and a mischievous smile curved her lips. As though she had succeeded in creeping up on him, for a surprise.

"Why, Ned," she chuckled. "You look as though you've been dreaming, and just woke up!"

He grimaced ruefully as she approached. With a kind of fierce gratitude, he took her in his arms. Yes, she was just like always.

"I guess I *was* dreaming, Betty," he whispered, feeling that mighty sense of relief. "I must have fallen asleep at the bench, here, and had a nightmare. I thought I had an accident at Pit Bend—and that a lot of worse things happened. . . . But it wasn't true. . . ."

Ned Vince's mind, over which there was still an elusive fog that he did not try to shake off, accepted apparent facts simply.

He did not know anything about the invisible radiations beating down upon him, soothing and dimming his brain, so that it would never question or doubt, or observe too closely the incongruous circumstances that must often appear. The lack of traffic in the street without, for instance—and the lack of people besides himself and Betty.

He didn't know that this machine-shop was built from his own memories of the original. He didn't know that this Betty was of the same origin—a miraculous fabrication of metal and energy-units and soft plastic. The trees outside were only lantern-slide illusions.

It was all built inside a great, opaque dome. But there were hidden television systems, too. Thus Loy Chuk's kind could study this ancient man—this Kaalleee. Thus, their motives were mostly selfish.

Loy, though, was not observing, now. He had wandered far out into the cold, sad sea-bottom, to ponder. He squeaked and chattered to himself, contemplating the magnificent, inexorable march of the ages. He remembered the ancient ruins, left by the final supermen.

"The Kaalleee believes himself home," Loy was thinking. "He will survive and be happy. But there was no other way. Time is an Eternal Wall. Our archeological researches among the cities of the supermen show the truth. Even they, who once ruled Earth, never escaped from the present by so much as an instant. . . ."

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MURDER FROM THE MOON

by ROBERT BLOCH

Four grasping hands sought his throat and choked him

Murder can be committed with two hands very well, but with four, it gives the killer quite a decided advantage indeed

CHAPTER I

Warm Welcome

"AND what do you think of America?" asked Bill Stone, eagerly.

"It surpasses my wildest expectations," answered the visitor.

"You surpass mine," Stone grunted under his breath. Nevertheless, the reporter scribbled hastily. A knot of his fellow scribes crowded closer around the visitor, waving notebooks and craning necks in unison.

"Do you plan a long stay?"

"I have accepted the hospitality of Solar Foundation," the soft voice purred. "It is their intention to exchange information with me for a considerable period of time."

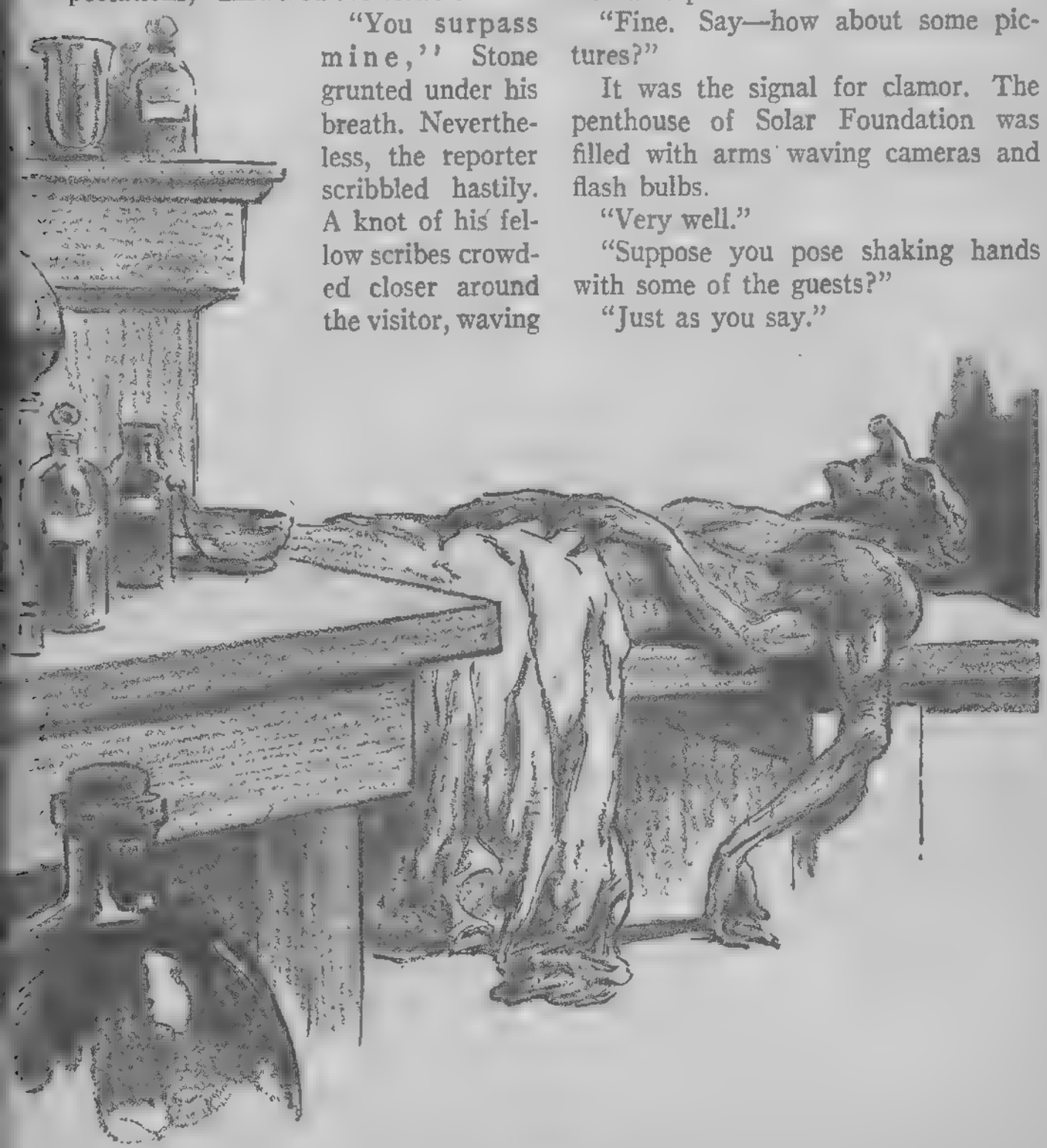
"Fine. Say—how about some pictures?"

It was the signal for clamor. The penthouse of Solar Foundation was filled with arms waving cameras and flash bulbs.

"Very well."

"Suppose you pose shaking hands with some of the guests?"

"Just as you say."



Bill Stone took charge. He faced the other end of the penthouse chamber, where scientists and savants stood waiting until the press had its will of their visitor.

"Let's see, now." The reporter scanned faces, counted beards, squinted at bald heads.

"Mr. Bennet, you'll pose, of course?"

A bulky young man in a white laboratory apron rose heavily to his feet and smiled in assent. He elbowed his stout body through the crowd of newshounds and took his place beside the visitor.

"I don't suppose you'd object if we included Professor Champion in the same shot?"

"Not at all." Bennet smiled at the scowling, bearded man who bustled towards him. "Hello, Butch," he said.

The Director of the Champion Foundation favored the young head of the Solar Foundation with an intent stare in which all the hatred of his bitter rivalry shone.

The reporter rattled off the names of the rest.

"Changara Dass."

A turbaned Hindu bowed low and approached.

"Miss Valery."

The smiling secretary of Solar took her place with a smile which caused several of the photographers to murmur, "Ah—cheesecake!" in a complimentary fashion.

"O.K." said Stone. He turned to the visitor. "Now, if you'll just shake hands with all of them—"

"All four at once?"

"Certainly."

Bill Stone turned again to the photographers at his side and exulted in low tones.

"Boy, what a shot!" he whispered. "Never anything like it in the history of the world before. Imagine—the four biggest scientists in the world shaking hands with *him*. And at the same time, too!"

IT was quite a scene at that.

There stood the visitor—his four long arms extended from two sets of shoulder blades, his four bird-like claws grasping the hands of the scientists. The visitor's snouted pink face stared affably into the distinguished countenances.

Stone's brain was already busy with captions and headlines.

MAN IN THE MOON MEETS MORTALS

VISITOR FROM VOID PROVES DOWN-TO-EARTH FELLOW

LUNAR LUMINARY SHAKES WITH SCIENTISTS

Why, the creature was almost human! True, it didn't look exactly like a man. Manlike body, yes—but with four arms. And the face was mostly nose; a mass of pinkish flesh with a slit mouth and two popping blue eyes.

Despite this it had a voice of human pitch and timbre, it spoke English, and it certainly seemed at home here on earth. This, and the marvel of the space-ship in which it arrived certainly indicated a mentality equal to any human's.

Stone was still lost in musing as the flashbulbs flickered. He was ready to resume the interview when the fat body of Stephen Bennet blocked him off. Young Bennet raised his arms and voice.

"Quiet please, gentlemen. I feel our distinguished visitor has had enough excitement for the moment. He will be glad to receive the press again tomorrow.

"At the moment I must insist that the reception proceed, so that he be given the opportunity to meet our guests. However, if you like, I'll issue a statement for the papers at this time."

The great room was hushed as Stephen Bennet, Director of the Solar Foundation, faced his audience.

"I wish my father were here today," said Bennet, softly. "It would have been the greatest triumph in a life filled with triumphs.

"You all know the story of Avery Bennet. Solar Foundation was his achievement. He was a great scientist, a great pioneer, a great discoverer. We know that, now.

"Yet forty years ago they thought him mad. The world felt that he had tricked his financial backers into setting up this gigantic laboratory, that his plans for a flight to the moon were fantastic, impossible. When he announced the completion of his lunar surveys and the construction of the ship to undertake the first voyage, he was laughed at.

"When he announced that he was taking a staff of research men with him, there was almost a court investigation. Finally, when my mother declared she'd acompany him, public indignation reached its peak.

" 'The Mad Noah.' That's what they called my father. You all know the story of how he launched the flight in secrecy. You all know how the press jeered when he failed to return.

"Only Changara Dass, here, believed. He was my father's friend. He fought to keep Solar Foundation legally in my father's name. He waited for a message, for pre-arranged signals that never came.

"At the end of six years—but you know *that* story. The ship that came back; without my father, without the crew. The ship that plummeted to earth in Jersey. The ship in which *I* was born, en route from the Moon to Earth."

HERE, Bennet cast a look of malice at bearded Professor Champion.

"Yes, I was born there in space—when my father locked my mother into the compartments and set the controls to chart the voyage back to earth.

"What became of him we have never been able to learn. What perils forced him to imprison my mother and send her back to the safety of earth? These questions have remained unanswered through the years. You know my mother died at my birth. It was Changara Dass who took me from that spaceship, reared me in the tradition of Solar Foundation.

"For thirty-odd years we have waited here—waited while so-called scientists have jeered and sneered at the story. It was too fantastic for them to swallow. It was all a hoax, they claimed. My father had never reached the moon. He'd hidden out somewhere—sent the ship back to prove his wild story of a flight. For thirty-odd years we have endured these insinuations, endured the malicious libels of men like Professor Champion."

Bennet cleared his throat.

"My father's secrets, we thought, died with him. We had no access to his plans for constructing a new vessel. He sent back no charts, no journals, no vestige of proof or record of his discoveries. We could not answer our critics. We could only wait.

"During those years I have had faith in my father. Changara Dass has had faith. We knew that sooner or later there would be proof forthcoming.

"The years have been bitter. I will not hide the fact. The press has made a mockery of my own life. Called me 'The Moon-calf.' Ridiculed the way I was educated here in the privacy of the Solar Foundation. Laughed at my habit of hiding from the world, carrying on astronomical and astro-physical research.

"Now it is my turn to laugh. Three

[illegible] ago, when the space-ship landed [illegible] tate, the world learned for the first time that my father's secrets had not died with him. That there was life on the moon—as he had always claimed. That this life possessed intelligence, that it had learned from him, worked with him, and created indisputable proof of its own.

"Because when the space-ship was entered, we found—our visitor.

"He is here today to tell the story to the world. And the world, laughing no longer, is waiting to hear him.

"I need not impress you with the importance of this moment. For the world, it means the beginning of a new era in scientific achievement. For me, it means a little more."

Bennet's voice softened.

"It means that I shall learn at last the story of my father's flight—of his life, and his last days. It means that the name of Bennet will rise from ignominy to shine beside the stars."

There was a murmur of excitement from the crowd.

"Today you—the great scientific names of this world—are gathered here to meet a man from another world."

Lila Valery stepped before the impassioned scientist and pressed his arm with a smile.

"Stephen, dear, you're talking too much. Let's get on with the reception."

"Guess you're right." Bennet waved his arm.

"You'll find drinks at the end of the room. Shall we proceed with a little informal discussion and introductions?"

CROWD murmurs swelled to conversational pitch. Bennet, Changara Dass, and Lila Valery moved towards the fleshy pink body of the lunar visitor. The scowling Professor Champion was already deep in conversation, his eyebrows wagging cynically.

The pink snout of the visitor flashed up when Bennet neared.

"I must see you at once. I have an urgent message for you. You are to come back with me, you know."

"What's that?" Bennet gasped.

"I cannot delay any longer. I had thought to humor you by attending this —reception, you call it?—and then leave. I see you have other ideas, so I must speak to you at once."

"This sounds interesting." Professor Champion gazed intently at the fleshy countenance.

But Bennet paled.

"Perhaps, if it's so urgent, we'd best step into the other room for a moment. Dass, you come with me. And you, Lila."

"Surely you wouldn't exclude a fellow-scientist from these revelations?" Champion's tone was mocking.

Bennet gave him a long look.

"Come along if you wish," he invited.

They retreated discreetly to the doorway of an adjoining chamber.

The lunar visitor shuffled along, waving his pinkish arms grotesquely.

"All this noise—this excitement—it makes me cold. You know, Stephen."

Bennet bit his lip. "Of course. I'd forgotten. Can I get you a cocktail?"

"Cocktail?"

"It contains alcohol. Warms the blood."

"It's a cold drink, though," Lila interjected.

"Yes—so it is. Better make it cocoa. Did you prepare some, Dass?"

The aged Hindu nodded.

"Get a cup and hurry."

The turbaned savant withdrew hastily. They stood alone in the antechamber.

"And now—"

"Spill it, friend."

The four-armed moon visitor turned. So did his companions.

"How did you sneak in here?" Bennet angrily addressed Bill Stone. The young reporter faced him with a disarming grin.

"It's my business to go after news. Something tells me there's plenty of it right in this room."

"I must ask you to leave at once. This is a private matter."

"Please." The moon man quavered, hysteria droning through the queer, high-pitched voice. "All this excitement—I am getting so cold—so cold."

The long arms were trembling now. The slick, poreless flesh was chafed, and the pinkish glow was queerly dull.

"I forgot. Where's Dass with that cocoa?"

Bennet made for the door, disappeared. Dass entered with the steaming cup a moment later. Bennet followed, grasped it hastily.

"Here you are."

"Wait—you're spilling it. Allow me." Champion, grinning in disdain at Bennet's excitement, grasped the cocoa and offered it to the visitor.

One of the four arms extended in a weaving, octopoidal pattern. The claw-like hand closed around the cup and the creature from the moon raised it to his lips, draining the steaming contents.

A little sigh of satisfaction bubbled from the fleshy pink throat.

Then came another sigh.

It wasn't satisfaction.

Four arms rose simultaneously. Four claws clutched at a convulsive neck. The tall body trembled in sudden revulsion.

"Wait—what's wrong—"

Lila Valery stepped forward to face the shuddering moon man, but it was too late for inquiry.

With a shrill scream the lunar visitor fell and huddled in a writhing heap on the carpet. As the others watched, the pinkish flesh slowly faded to a dead rose colour, then turned silver as frost. In less than a minute the thing on the floor lay still. Still and—

"Dead!"

Changara Dass felt for a pulse forever stilled.

"Dead and—cold." Champion drew his hand away from the neck with a shudder. "Cold as ice."

"Oh!" Lila Valery hid her eyes with her hands. For the white body was quite silver now—silver and shining, like the moon that gave it birth.

They stared.

All but Bill Stone, the reporter. He made the door in three strides.

"Got my story," he panted. "And what a story! THE MAN IN THE MOON IS—MURDERED!"

CHAPTER II

The Strangler from the Sky

IT was Lila Valery who stopped Stone. The fact that the reporter allowed himself to be persuaded was a tribute to her eloquence—or perhaps to her brown eyes.

"Don't you see?" the girl pleaded. "It would create a scandal that would ruin Solar Foundation. We can't let those people outside know."

"Got to notify the police anyway," Stone argued.

"Why? Are you sure it's murder? It might be shock—exhaustion—anything. You can't print such a story until you have proof."

"But—"

Champion intervened.

"I think she's right. Let me go out and dismiss the guests. Tell them our visitor needs rest. Then when we're alone, I'll see to it that you get your story. I'm interested in going to the bottom of this affair myself. I'll take this cooca, with Bennet's permission, and analyze it for poison. You'll get

your story, I promise you, and shortly."

Champion flung a baleful glance at Stephen Bennet, who shrugged. "Go ahead," he mumbled. "Does that suit you, Stone?"

The reporter answered, but he looked at Lila Valery.

"I suppose it's worth waiting for."

Champion stalked out.

In a few moments he returned. "They're leaving," he announced. "Now, if you will excuse me for a few moments, I'll make use of your excellent laboratories, Mr. Bennet. Perhaps Changara Dass would accompany me to verify my report?"

Dass rose silently. His brown hand closed around the cup. He scooped it from the floor where it had fallen. A few drops of brownish liquid still rested in the rounded side.

Together the scientist and the savant departed. Stone, Lila, and Stephen Bennet remained.

It was Stone who drew a couch-cover over the silent silver monstrosity on the floor. Bennet and the girl were huddled in the corner.

The stout young man was trembling as he rocked to and fro, head bowed.

"Don't—Stephen," Lila whispered.

"I can't help it," sighed Bennet. "Don't you realize what this means? Here, at the very moment of triumph, all that I've worked for and lived for has been snatched away. The clearing of my name, and my father's name. The research and knowledge that could have been ours. Gone now. Because he died before he could speak!"

"Dou you think he was—murdered?" Lila whispered.

"I don't know. I can't think. Dass carried the cocoa. I handled it. And Champion gave it to him. If it contained poison, we're the only suspects. And none of us has a motive."

"Perhaps not." Stone thought aloud. "You haven't, Bennet. But Professor Champion is your rival, after all. He has been the chief critic of you and your father, and he is the head of the Champion Foundation."

Surprisingly enough, Bennet bridled. His pudgy features creased indignantly.

"Professor Champion, whatever his scientific attitude may be, is a man of unquestioned integrity. Certainly he would never be so foolhardy as to endanger his reputation by so clumsy a trick."

"And this Changara Dass?"

"Changara Dass is my friend, my father's friend. Today's success meant as much to him as it did to me."

LILA VALERY rose and faced the reporter. "I think your hunch is wrong. Our lunar visitor had a chill. You heard him complain of the cold, didn't you? We don't know anything about the physiology of these creatures. Probably he succumbed to his seizure just as he drank the cocoa. I'm willing to wager that Dass and Champion find no trace of poison in that cocoa."

"Right you are." Champion's booming voice rose as he entered the room, followed by the Hindu. He faced Stephen Bennet.

"We found nothing, absolutely nothing," the Hindu added. His turbaned head nodded slowly as he bent over the cloth-covered object on the floor.

"We shall, therefore, proceed with the autopsy at once."

"Wait a minute." Bennet was on his feet.

"Yes?"

"Do you think it's really—necessary?"

"If you don't do it, the coroner will."

"But the law has no rights over a lunar inhabitant."

"Stephen Bennet." The Hindu's

voice was soft, grave. "I have known you all your life. Was I not as a father and mother to you?"

"Yes, Changara Dass."

"Have we not worked together, planned together for this day? Have we not dreamed of the heritage of wisdom which might be ours?"

"True."

Dass's eyes gleamed. "Today we have met seeming failure. Death has stilled the voice that could have told us all we wished to learn. But with an autopsy, we can perhaps cheat death."

"How?"

"We can study the physiology of our visitor. The structure, the mechanics of his anatomy. Even if we find no trace of poison, there are things we want to learn, you and I. Is that not true?"

Bennet bit his lip.

"Yes. You're right. Go ahead with it then, man—but don't talk about it. I don't like to hear you talk about it. I can't stand it."

His voice rose, cracked. Lila Valery's arms soothed his huddled shoulders.

Silently Dass stooped and gathered the limp, cold body of the moon man in his arms. The dangling silver arms hung bobbing from the folds of the cloth as he carried the corpse from the room.

Lila turned to Stephen Bennet.

"Lie down. Try to rest," she urged. "It will be an hour or so at least. We'll go down the hall."

Champion cleared his throat. "Might as well stick here and see this thing through," he decided. "But I'm not going to sit around. I'm hungry. There's a table full of food in the next room, and that's where you'll find me."

IN THE end it was Bill Stone who followed Lila Valery down the twilight-darkened hall to the office. He sat on the desk, swinging his legs, his blue eyes frankly appraising the girl in an admiring grin.

"You seem to be the only cheerful person around here," the girl murmured. "This place is like a—"

"Morgue," Stone finished for her. "That's what it is, with bodies being dissected, and all the trimmings."

"Please, let's not talk about it," Lila whispered. "I'm worried."

"Bennet?"

"Yes. He's so upset about this thing."

"He'll sleep it off and forget it." Stone smiled. "You must be very fond of him—covering him up and everything. Maternal instinct?"

"We're engaged." Her voice was low.

"Oh. I understand."

"Stephen's a brilliant man. But he has to be watched over, always. Changara Dass is like a nursemaid to him. Humors him. Because he isn't like the rest of us, you see."

"No, I don't see, exactly."

"Well, you heard what he said today about his father—Avery Bennet, who founded Solar, and made the moon voyage. How his mother went along, and how Stephen was born out there in space on the way back.

"Stephen has never forgotten his heritage. Never forgotten that he's—well, an outsider, really. Sometimes I think he's really alien to this world at heart.

"You know, he's never left this Foundation since he came here?"

"Really?"

"Changara Dass brought him up. He had a private tutor. He lives here in his own apartments, refuses to go outside. His childhood was hardly—normal. All his life he's hated the world for what it did to his father. He shuns

Stephen has worked and waited only for the day when proof of his father's discovery would be forthcoming. Not until then, he swore, would he enter the outside world."

"You mean he doesn't even go out of the building for a shave?" Stone asked, incredulously.

"No. Even the tailors come here for his fittings. He's a recluse. Or was, until I met him. I've tried to wean him away from these eccentricities of his. I think I've succeeded, a little. But even though we're engaged, I sometimes feel that he *resents* me. He gets these bitter moods and I don't understand him. Oh, but why should I tell you this—"

"It's been very interesting," Stone protested. "Very. But tell me—what about the landing of this space-ship and our late lunar friend? Just what did Bennet expect to learn from all this?"

"I don't know, exactly. When the ship came down, three days ago, he and Changara Dass were as surprised as the rest of the world. When they found this creature inside and it asked at once to be taken to Solar Foundation, Stephen knew that it was the expected proof from his father at last.

"He told me that it meant a complete vindication of everything he'd claimed. That his father had discovered life on the moon, that he had probably lived on up there for a long time—long enough to establish communication and interchange knowledge with the lunar inhabitants.

"Naturally, all this was conjecture. Stephen hoped that the moon man would possess complete information—tell him of Avery Bennet's life and fate, and exchange data. The moon man asked to be brought here to Solar Foundation, as you know; asked for Stephen Bennet, and refused to divulge anything to anyone else."

"In other words, he made the voyage especially to see Bennet?"

"Yes."

STONE pursed his lips.

"Miss Valery—Lila—do you recall what the moon man said when we went into the private room? About some message he had for Stephen—about wanting him to come back?"

"That's right."

"Did he mean that he wanted Stephen Bennet to return to the moon *with* him?"

"I don't know. He *did* say something like that, didn't he?"

"I wonder why."

"Perhaps he had news of his father."

"Perhaps." Bill Stone dismissed the notion momentarily. He rose, wiped his forehead.

"Whew! Don't see how he froze to death. It's hot enough here to boil eggs."

"They keep it warm enough here at Solar Foundation. Changara Dass is something of a fanatic on the subject of air-conditioning. He sees to it that the temperature is always up in the eighties and nothing can argue him out of it."

"I wonder if the old swami is making any progress?"

"Progress?"

"Yes, on his little carv—on the autopsy, I mean."

The answer came in the form of a sudden buzz from the desk telephone.

Stone lifted the receiver.

"Mr. Stone?" It was the voice of Dass, a hasty whisper.

"Yes."

"Mr. Stone, I wonder if you would care to step down the hall to the surgery. It's at the far end, at the right."

"Why? Something up?"

"I think, Mr. Stone, that I have news for you. Some very startling news."

"I'll be right down."

The reporter clicked the receiver back.

"Lila, you stay here. I'm going over to the morgue—I mean, the surgery."

"And leave me here all alone? Not on your life!"

The girl joined him.

Together, the two moved down the black corridor of the empty Foundation. Once outside, Lila made it evident that she regretted her decision to accompany him. The girl shivered at the shadows, and involuntarily her hand clutched Stone's wrist.

"I'm scared," she murmured.

"Of what? There's no one here but ourselves."

"I can't help it. I have a feeling something's wrong."

"Forget it. Dass is waiting for us. Here."

Bill Stone pushed open the surgery door.

They entered.

Lila screamed.

Changara Dass was waiting for them. But the turbaned Hindu would wait forever. He slumped forward over the horrible pinkish body of the moon man, his eyes bulging glassily in a fixed stare at the corpse on the slab. His brown skin was very pale indeed, save for one spot around his neck.

One spot on Changara Dass's neck—a long, pinkish spot forming the outline of a hand. A hand that had twisted around the Hindu's throat and strangled him to death.

CHAPTER III

The Lunatic

THEY found Bennet on his couch down the hall. Champion dropped his sandwich in the outer chamber a moment later. The four of them were back in the surgery room, trying hard to keep their eyes away from the death that seemed to lurk in the shadows.

"The hand," Champion whispered. "Look at the prints. No human hand makes such an impression."

"It was his," Bennet muttered. "His." He started down at the pinkish body lying on the slab. "Look at those claws. They did it."

"But he's dead," Stone answered. "Dead man can't rise and murder."

"Dead *men* cannot rise," Bennet groaned. "But he wasn't a man. He was a creature from another world, another planet. Who knows what ghastly laws govern such beings?"

"You're hysterical, Bennet," scowled Professor Champion. "Look." His hands went to the creature's armpits. "These tendons were severed by the dissecting knife. The thing, even if animated, couldn't raise its arms, let alone strangle a man with its hands."

"But it did," Bennet whispered. "Or *something* did. A ghost, perhaps. Perhaps it was a ghost."

"Don't be a fool!" Champion objected. "Let's reason this thing out. Dass called Stone. In less than two minutes Stone and Miss Valery arrived. They found Dass dead."

"Dead." Bennet couldn't control himself. "Dass is dead. He had found something out and he was going to tell. So he died. The moon guards its secrets well. It's fate, I tell you! We weren't meant to know such things—that's what we get for meddling! Let's burn the bodies, get out of here!"

"Stephen."

"I'm sorry, darling. But it's too much."

"I know. Let's go back to the office."

"Go ahead." Champion took command. "I'll phone the police."

"Police?"

"Of course. There's no doubt of at least one murder, now.

"That's right," Bill Stone agreed. "And I'll phone the office with the story."

Bennet shrugged.

"I suppose," he said, tonelessly, "This means the end, but it has to be."

Together he and Lila left the room. Champion followed.

"Coming, Stone?" he called.

"I'll stay here for a minute and look around. Want to get the details straight in my mind. Once the cops get here we reporters won't have a chance."

"Very well. I'll go back to the reception room and phone from there."

Champion left.

Bill Stone stared down at the partly-dissected cadaver of the moon-creature. Once more he gazed at the horrible prints on the dead Hindu's throat. He fingered the scalpels and instruments on the adjoining table. He noted the empty cocoa cup and the partly-filled retorts beside it. He ran his eyes along the cabinet of pharmacopia.

SUDDENLY his eyes were arrested by a label. He opened a metal tin curiously. Then he stared at the dead moon man once again.

With a shrug of decision, he selected an empty glass from the table and poured the contents of the tin into it. Then he covered the glass with a handkerchief.

Quickly, he left the room and headed down the corridor. It was pitch black now, and silent as death. Silent as the death that crept through the night about him. Death that had crept and then sprung.

As he neared the closed office door the silence was broken by the strident murmur of conversation.

Stone paused outside.

Bennet and Lila, inside.

"But don't you see?" Bennet's voice. "I can't face that, Lila. It will ruin me —ruin the Foundation. The publicity, the investigation, the suspicions. And in the end, they'll never get anywhere. They can't bring Dass or the moon man back to life. They'll never be able to tell the story that will clear my father's name."

"But your idea is madness."

"Why? What other way of escape is open? The space-ship is waiting. It's ready. I have no charts or instruments, but the control system itself should be easily mastered. We can take it and get away now, before the police arrive. Come with me, Lila."

"To the moon? No, Stephen—I can't."

"Lila, don't you understand? I want to know. I want to find out for myself. I could go there and prove that my father was right—go there and return with the full story. We could be together, you and I.

"And who knows, Lila? Who knows what we might find up there? Avery Bennet might have built himself an empire. We could rule that empire, Lila, you and I. I am his son. I have the heritage of my birth. Oh, I know it sounds like madness, but it's the one chance, the only chance."

"You're wrong."

Bill Stone entered quietly, stood in the doorway. Bennet wheeled, his pudgy arms waving, his face flushed with agitation.

"Stone!"

"I think I can help you out," the reporter replied. "No need to go to the bother of that lunar trip. At least I think I know how our moon man was murdered."

"Poison?"

"No." Stone smiled. "He was literally frozen to death. That's what Dass must have discovered during the au-

topsy. That's why he called me. And I think I've found out what did it."

The reporter turned to the girl.

"Lila—go get Professor Champion. He'll want to hear this."

The girl nodded, left the room.

As the door closed, Bennet shook his head.

"I still don't understand."

"It's very simple." Stone held out the glass, covered by his handkerchief. "This stuff here did it."

Bennet took the glass and held it. His eyes met Stone's. "But what about Changara Dass? Who killed him?"

"That's a puzzler, isn't it? Perhaps we can solve that when the others get back."

ABRUPTLY, Bennet winced. "Here, Stone—take this. It's too damned cold to hold."

Stone retrieved the glass.

"Aren't you going to look inside?" he asked. "Cold or not, I'd think you'd be interested in what it contains. Unless," he murmured, "unless you already know."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you murdered the moon man."

Stephen Bennet laughed. Then he did a very curious thing. His hands fumbled with his white jacket.

Stone watched him closely. Too closely. He didn't see Bennet's feet glide forward. They glided swiftly—and suddenly Stephen Bennet sprang.

His fists crashed against the reporter's face. Stone moved back, arms flailing as he beat against the bulky body of his assailant.

Bennet's blows glanced from his forehead. A fist dug into his eye. Stone parried, trying to keep off those lunging arms.

Bennet was punching, punching. And then Stone felt cold horror. For as Bennet's fists punched at his face, Bennet's hands were locked around his neck!

It could not be—but it was! Stone saw the fists hammer towards him through a red haze. And at the same time he felt fingers tighten in his throat. Strong, tearing fingers digging away his life!

Bill Stone glanced down and saw them then—saw what was strangling and clawing at his neck.

Saw, from Bennet's opened jacket, *the two pink arms—the two extra arms, ending in the birdlike claws*. The claws of a moon man!

Then the red haze welled up. Stone's head whirled. Desperately he parried blows from human fists. And all the while the hidden hands from inside Bennet's jacket pressed and pressed.

Stone went to his knees.

The monster was gasping now. Bennet's great bulging eyes shone with maniacal intensity as he ripped and tore. A high, wheezing cackle burst from his corded, pinkish neck.

Blindly, Stone fumbled for his pocket. Bennet was bending him back. The cold claws were digging deep. In a moment it would all be over. In a moment—

With a last desperate wrench, Stone's fingers closed about the glass, tore away the handkerchief. One hand rose to Bennet's neck. He pressed the glass down, let the contents pour forward.

Bennet screamed. The two pinkish arms fell away, tore at Stone's hand, clawed at the glass cupped tightly against Bennet's neck.

Stone rose. He pressed the glass down.

Bennet's fingers clutched the air. His human fists fell. A gurgling came from a pinkish neck that slowly whitened. The color drained from Bennet's face.

The glass dug deeper. And then

Stephen Bennet fell. Fell like a white ghost, like a silver ghost.

In a moment the bulky body lay inert upon the floor. The two horrid tentacles lay limp, the claws extended upwards in a last gesture of supplication.

"BILL!"

Lila was at Stone's side, and Champion with her.

"I had to do it," the reporter gasped. "I had to."

"Those arms—" the girl whispered. "Look at those arms."

"No wonder he always wore that heavy jacket," Stone whispered. "Look at the straps—he had them strapped down at his sides. No wonder he never went out; had a special tailor."

"What does it mean?"

"It means that Stephen Bennet's mother was not human," Stone answered. "That was his secret, and his father's secret. Changara Dass must have known, and shielded Bennet all these years. Stephen Bennet had moon blood in his veins.

"When the lunar visitor came, he had a mission. He wanted Bennet to forsake earth and return to the moon. Bennet preferred the fame that would be his if he remained here on earth, as a human.

"The lunar visitor was about to insist—and Bennet feared he would reveal his secret, if necessary, in order to make him go back.

"So Bennet murdered him. Changara Dass discovered how he did it during the autopsy, and phoned me. Bennet must have been listening in on the wire. He got to the surgery before I did. Using his lunar tentacles, he strangled Dass.

"Then he wanted to escape in the space-ship, knowing he'd be discovered if the police examined him. He was pleading with Lila here to accompany him when I walked in and announced that I'd solved the lunar visitor's death. So he tried to kill me as well."

"But how did he do it?" Champion asked. "That's still a mystery." He scowled. "There was no poison—I'm sure of that."

"Of course there wasn't. No need for it. Bennet, having lunar blood himself, knew the weakness of the moon beings. Knew they cannot stand cold. He always had it hot as an oven here, you remember.

"So he slipped something into the cocoa which immediately chilled the moon man's system; paralyzed his peculiar blood stream with sudden cold. Something that wouldn't show up in analysis; something we'd never expect in steaming cocoa."

"What was that?"

"Nothing but simple, every-day dry ice," Stone grinned.

"It steamed naturally in the cup and left no traces. I found a can of it in the surgery, brought a glassful here. When Bennet attacked me, I pressed the stuff against his throat. You know the rest."

There was a long silence in the little room. Lila's hand went to Bill's shoulders as they stared at the tentacled body on the floor.

"He wanted me to go there with him—to the moon," she whispered. "I'm glad I refused."

"Perhaps it is not meant for men to dwell beyond earth," mused Champion, gravely.

"Let's get out of here," was all Bill Stone said. They moved towards the door. Stone snapped out the light.

"Look!" whispered Lila.

Through the high windows, a shaft of silvery moonlight crept into the room. It moved over the floor and bathed the grotesque, crumpled body in an evil glow. But in its rays the face of Stephen Bennet shone with a peaceful light.

"Maybe he's gone there, now. Back up there, where his spirit belongs."

"Maybe," Stone nodded. "But right at the moment, my spirit belongs somewhere else. Somewhere where there is electric light and a little down-to-earth entertainment. Want to join me?"

"All right."

"I may have a few drinks, too."

Lila smiled. "That's all right with me," she murmured. "But Bill, if you have a drink, promise me one thing."

"What's that?"

"Don't put any ice in it."

They closed the door behind them. In the little room, the silvery light continued to pour down on the dead face of the man from the moon.

A BEDTIME STORY

By A. MORRIS

We've had so many stories about termite and ant civilizations—now here's one about the bedbug!

"GOOD-NIGHT. Sleep tight. Don't let the bedbugs bite." Most of us have heard or even repeated this little ditty, not even knowing what a bedbug was or looked like. This little pesty insect has quite a history, one that we think you'll be interested in.

The bedbug is a reddish-brown, flattened, wingless nocturnal insect, peculiar to the fixed habitations of man and subsisting by sucking his blood. It represents a family of heteropterous bugs, which, with numerous allied forms, live upon the juices of plants and animals. This parasitic life has caused degeneracy, until now this species has acquired a very flat body, capable of hiding in narrow cracks, and has completely lost its wings. It has also gained the power of resisting great cold and of fasting indefinitely, so that it easily survives long intervals between tenants in a house—a fact which often accounts for an otherwise mysterious appearance of the pest.

Its mouth consists of a three-parted proboscis, which can be thrust through the skin like a hollow needle and then becomes a blood pump. The parasite hides by day in cracks and crevices of floors, walls, and furniture, frequenting beds especially, simply because there it gets its living at night. The eggs of the bedbug are tiny, whitish, and oval, laid in clusters in the crevices used by the bugs for concealment. They hatch in about eight days, the young being almost transparent "nits", which grow darker in color as they increase in size until, when full-grown, they may be a quarter of an inch long. This growth is attained by means of five moults, and if food and warmth is plentiful, maturity may be attained in three months. Under adverse conditions growth may be greatly prolonged.

A female bedbug may lay several packets of eggs and several broods may be raised each year. About 250 eggs are laid each spring in lots of 50, so that under favorable conditions—poor housekeeping—the multiplication is extremely rapid.

These insects are believed to have come originally from India, and have been known as house pests from the earliest times. Aristotle believed that they arose spontantaneously from sweat. Their spread is mainly due to their being carried from place to place in furniture, vehicles, and clothing. They do not seem to have reached England before the seventeenth century, since the word "bug" is not used in Shakespeare's works, and the British designate this pest primarily by that word. America received this pestilence from Europe, and it is now spread all over the world by means of ships.

Entomologists believe the bedbug is restricted to man, although there is a popular belief that it infests certain domestic animals, especially poultry. However, science alleges that all similar bugs found upon swallows, bats, poultry and pigeons are species peculiar to each of these animals and do not attack man.

The only way to get rid of this pest is by persistent and minute cleanliness. Bedbugs are eaten by various insects, especially cockroaches and ants. But then who wants to get rid of one evil with another? Benzine gasolene, kerosene, corrosive sublimate, or hot water, usually are able to rid an ordinary home of these insects, but larger apartment buildings, hotels, etc., need a thorough fumigation with sulphur or bisulphid of carbon. This method is quite effective.

Now that we know all about bedbugs, let's hope we never come in contact with these miniature vampires.

In two seconds a beautiful battle was raging . . .

FLIGHT FROM FARISHA

By DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

Farisha's heavily fortified base was doomed and the legions of Venus rushed toward victory, but . . .

THE savage onslaught against the heavily fortified Federation interplanetary base on Farisha began on the morning of May second, at ten o'clock, in the year 2130 A.D., when the special radios announced excitedly that the Venusians had established their first footholds on six small asteroids surrounding the base.

To the breathlessly waiting universe, and especially to the Federation G.H.Q. on Earth, the news of this attack on the far flung and supposedly impregnable interplanetary outpost came as a shock. For even though the Venusians, since the outbreak of the Fourth Interplanetary War six weeks previously, had already succeeded in swarming over more than three-fourths of the interplanetary belt against which their first treacherous attack was launched, Farisha had been considered by all as the one vital garrison which would check the aggressors until a counteroffensive could be launched.

None could believe that it stood in danger of falling.

Farisha was an unconquerable bulwark; everyone knew it was. And none was more certain of this fact than the military garrison and civilian population on Farisha itself. None save Space

General Roger J. Selwin, who had arrived on Farisha to take command of the garrison less than two days after the outbreak of the war, realized the sickening truth of the matter.

"God knows how long we can hold out," General Selwin said on the morning after the Venusians had established their preliminary footholds.

However, he didn't say this publicly, for it would have been giving assurance and comfort to the enemy. He said it in the privacy of his headquarters office on Farisha, and said it to one man.

That man was First Mate Harlan Dawson, of the luxury space liner, *Astera*, which was then moored in Farisha's space harbor.

Dawson was a big man, in his early thirties, with massive shoulders and ebon black hair. His eyes were so brown as to be almost black, and had the hard glitter of coal to them. His crooked, cynical grin and brutal handsomeness masked one of the shrewdest spacefaring minds in the eastern interplanetary belt.

Harlan Dawson listened to this statement from the Space General in command of the outpost, and lighted a thin, small, junovian cigar.

"Your predecessor was certainly asleep at the switch," Dawson remarked, the cigar bobbing between his even, white teeth. "Hell, your own round-up of Venusians on the base itself showed that more than a thousand were in our midst when the war broke out."

Space General Selwin sighed. "Asleep is no word for it, Dawson. It was negligence, criminal negligence. But, I suppose he was hampered as badly as I've been. The moment I arrived and looked the situation over, I space-radioed for at least another ten squadrons of space combat fighters and heavy space bombers. My space-radiogram has yet to be answered. We could use those bombers and fighters now, God knows."

"Can't shake 'em loose, eh?" Dawson said, referring to the Venusian invaders who'd established footholds on the six surrounding asteroids.

GENERAL SELWIN'S jaw was grim. "We can't even try. We have but two space combat squadrons on Farisha, here. We don't have a single space bomber less than ten years

"Your predecessor was asleep at the switch."

old. Do you realize what that means, Dawson? Do you realize the hideous implications of it?"

Harlan Dawson nodded soberly. "I've realized it for some time, General. But hell, I'm just a civilian. I'd never have had a chance of rousing any of the military bigwigs here to action. I saw the first glimmerings of Venusian interplanetary ambitions over eight years ago. Hell, I was Master of a space freighter running between Earth and Venus when I was twenty-three. I quit when Venusian capital bought controlling interest in the company I worked under."

"I know your record exceptionally *well, Dawson,*" *Space General Selwin* said. "Undoubtedly I know phases of it which you yourself have forgotten, or would like to forget. When you quit that berth you just mentioned, you went out on your own, running *electraguns* and munitions through the blockade to beleaguered little Stevensa.* You risked the wrath of the Federation to do so, even though the Federation was remaining completely neutral while Venus overran and seized their neighboring little independent asteroid."

Dawson looked silently down at the knuckles of his big hand. He shifted the thin little cigar in his teeth, then looked up at the Space General.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

"I've checked your record, completely," Space General Selwin replied. "I had to, before I was certain that you'd do for the job I have."

Dawson removed his cigar and leaned back, his big frame relaxed in his chair. He exhaled a cloud of blue smoke through his nostrils.

"I'm glad you're satisfied," he said. "Now tell me more about this job you're assigning to me. How do you know I'll take it?"

"You'll take it," Space General Selwin declared positively, "because the fate of the Federation, of Earth itself, might well hang on the success or failure of the task."

"That's a good enough reason," Dawson admitted softly. "Go on."

"*Your vessel, the Astera,*" the Space General began, "is the fastest craft of its size harbored at Farisha. It's the fourth fastest vessel in the eastern interplanetary belt. Surrounded as we are by a Venusian space battle fleet of God knows how many craft, it becomes increasingly evident that any effort to run their hostile blockade will be extremely hazardous, even dubious. Our own space battle strength here in the harbor couldn't hope to meet the Venusians on anything but tragically unequal terms. And although they're well gunned, they aren't fast enough to make a run for it."

Dawson's heavy black brows went up a notch. "You're planning an evacuation?" he asked.

General Selwin shook his head. "Not in a military sense. You also realize that most of our civilian population disregarded my warning to leave a few weeks back. They are all still too complacent to avail themselves of any such chance, even if it still remained. And expect in this instance, the chance no longer remains. You see, I have ordered certain valuable men in the Federation's diplomatic and state corps here on Farisha to leave immediately with you on the *Astera.* It is in my power to order them to do so, though I doubt if they would realize the danger strongly enough to leave unless I forced them to."

DAWSON nodded. "You're right on that," he admitted. "But I'm a little bit behind your line of planning. I'm not the Master of the *Astera.* I'm merely the First Officer. Have you confided in my Skipper, Benson?"

Space General Selwin shook his head again. "I've ordered your line to transfer Benson to inactive duty. When the *Astera* leaves, you'll be Master."

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* Stevensa—A small asteroid lying at the edge of the interplanetary belt dominated by Venus. From its discovery in 2094, it had been an independent democracy. In 2123, however, Venus—in line with its long range plan of aggression—seized and sacked this little asteroid, setting it up as a puppet unit of the Venusian State. The universe at that time, weary of the recent carnage of the Third Interplanetary War, although in sympathy with the struggle of the little state, held a hands-off policy, permitting it to be swallowed by Venus.—Ed.

Dawson whistled. "You ordered that?"

The General nodded. "Benson is a good man, but he doesn't know this interplanetary belt half as well as you do. I don't have the confidence in him that I have in you. He's fine as the Master of an interplanetary luxury liner, which the *Astera* certainly is. And during times of peace he knows his job well. But this isn't a peaceful task I have in mind. It's a dangerous assignment, as I've said before. Benson is over sixty. You're young, and you're a fighter. You're the only man in the Merchant Space Service in this interplanetary belt whom I consider capable of getting the *Astera* through."

Dawson considered this soberly. Then he asked:

"And aside from members of the state and diplomatic staff, who else will be aboard the *Astera?*"

"There'll be a scattering of interplanetary merchants and their wives. Most of the wives and children of the Federation space soldiers stationed here—I ordered them to leave. And any other civilian residents who wish to take advantage of my last offer for their escape."

Dawson nodded. "There won't be many of the latter," he predicted. "Everyone on this damned base is far too smug and sure of its utter invulnerability."

"I know," Space General Selwin agreed gravely. "But there's little I can do about it."

"Supposing," Dawson said, "that Farisha doesn't fall? Supposing by some miracle it can stave off the Venusians until relief can arrive? Supposing still further that I fail to bring the *Astera* through the Venusian gauntlet, and that my vessel and all aboard are lost to the enemy? Do you realize what a spot that would put your neck in? Do you realize that people all over the universe will say that you should have known the human beings you ordered from the base here would have been far safer in remaining?"

"I know that," Selwin said quietly. "And I might add that my daughter will be aboard the *Astera* when you leave port. I am taking the same risk with her safety as I am with the others. And so help me God, it's the only thing to do. Farisha is doomed!"

THE door of the room on the fourth floor of the Royal Hotel in Farisha was slightly ajar, and the thin, middle-sized, beady-eyed man in the light linen tunic, knocked once on it briefly, then pushed into the room without waiting for an answer.

The girl whirled to face the intruder

The slim, raven-haired girl standing before the traveling bag opened on the bed, whirled swiftly to face the intruder. She was wearing merely brief

undergarments, and the linen smock tunic spread on the bed gave further evidence that she was in the process of dressing.

"Oh," she said briefly. "It's you."

The beady-eyed man coughed slightly into a handkerchief, then mopped the perspiration from his bald head. His sharp features were horizontally marked by a small black moustache waxed at the tips.

"It's like I thought," he said. His voice was tenor, with a slight whine to it. "The *Astera* is gonna make a run for it."

THE girl struggled into her fresh linen tunic smock. Then she was smoothing it out, and adjusting her raven locks before a *duralloy* mirror on the wall. She answered him over her shoulder, fluffing her hair as she spoke.

"Then you've booked our passage?" she asked.

The sharp featured chap sat down on the bed, coughing again into his handkerchief. He glanced down idly into the open traveling case, then answered in a weary half whine.

"Yeah. Of course. What didja think I'd do?"

"Any trouble?" the girl asked.

"I'm a small interplanetary merchant," the man said smirkingly. "Don't you remember? What you think I been running that stinking little shop here on Farisha for the last six months for?" He laughed. "For the same reason you been dancing in that cheap joint for the same length of time."

"They certainly plan in advance," the girl remarked.

"They're smart, that's all. That's why the Federation'll never lick 'em in a million years," the man answered. "We're on the winning team this time, baby."

The girl turned to face him, her features troubled. "You think they'll take Farisha?" she asked.

The beady-eyed man smirked.

"What do you think?" he asked.

The signs of worried indecision increased on the girl's features.

"But what about the civilian population here on Farisha?" she asked. "What sort of treatment will they receive from the Venusian invaders?"

The man shrugged indifferently. "They didn't leave when old Selwin gave them the hint. What they'll get now will be their own fault."

The girl seemed to shudder slightly, and she turned back to the mirror.

"You're not going soft, are you baby?" the man asked.

The girl whirled to face him, brown eyes blazing. "Who said I was?"

The beady-eyed man grinned, mopping his bald head again with his handkerchief.

"No one. No one said you was," he declared. "Only—"

The girl broke in suspiciously. "Only what?" she demanded.

"Only I just wanta make sure you don't go soft on this job. Especially when I tell you that your old chum," the bald headed man paused to give the last word a leering implication, "Harlan Dawson is gonna be aboard the *Astera* as Master."

"Dawson!" The girl gasped the name.

"Yeah," said the man, watching her carefully. "Yeah, that's what I said, Dawson."

"I hate his guts," the girl said softly.

"Thought you kinda went for him once."

"Maybe I did," she said quickly. "Maybe I was space-dazed."

"A lot of dames have been spaced-dazed by Dawson," the man said.

The girl didn't answer.

"And you say you hate his guts," the man declared.

The girl's face went suddenly hard. "You bet I do," she said.

"That's all I wanted to make sure about," the beady-eyed chap told her. "Because you're gonna have to play up to him. He'll have papers that we're getting plenty good Venusian dough to grab. We gotta see to it that he doesn't burn them when the vessel is brought to a halt."

"The vessel *will* be stopped?" the girl asked.

Her companion nodded. "That's *my* job. I've men placed in the crew. Your job'll be to keep an eye on the papers, and Dawson."

"Don't worry about my end of it," the girl told him . . .

CHAPTER II

IN the Master's stateroom aboard the luxury liner *Astera,* Harlan Dawson, still clad in the wrinkled linen tunic that he had worn that morning during his conversation with Space General Selwin, was at work.

A bottle of junovian brandy was at his elbow, and a space chart was stretched before him on the table where he sat. Spread out on the fresh surface of his space bunk at the other side of the room was his officer's tunic, whitely immaculate and gleaming with gold braid.

Dawson's even white teeth were clamped, as usual, over a thin, small, junovian cigar which he rolled from one corner of his mouth to the other as he frowned intently at the chart before him.

A knock sounded on the bulkhead door of his stateroom.

Dawson looked up.

"Come in!" he shouted. His voice was deep, rich.

A young, blond, Second Officer entered, his cheeks pink, his eyes eager. He was perfectly turned out in his white uniform tunic. He seemed slightly surprised by his skipper's appearance.

"I'm Keller, sir. Your new Second," he explained self-consciously.

Dawson grinned amiably.

"Pull up a chair, Mister. I'd like you to look over this course I've just started."

Second Officer Keller awkwardly pulled a chair over to the table and perched himself uneasily on the edge of its seat. He craned his neck toward the chart before Dawson, trying to see its details.

"I had you shifted from your old berth to this liner because I had reason to believe you're a good man, Keller," Dawson said casually. "Just in case you wondered what promoted you to service on the *Astera* so suddenly."

Second Officer Keller flushed in genuine modesty. "Thank you, sir. I needn't say how pleased I was to learn that you wanted me as Second aboard the *Astera.* I was on packet duty, as a First, when I got my orders to report here at noon today."

Dawson nodded briefly. "Yes. I know. And as you are probably aware, this is my first voyage as Master on the *Astera.* We're running a dangerous gauntlet. The Second Officer whose place you took has a wife and six kids. I wouldn't let him come along, even though he wanted to do so."

He pushed the chart around under the nose of the young Second, who stared thoughtfully at it in silence for several minutes. Dawson sat back, watching the youth. Pink-cheeked, all right, he reflected. Plenty callow in some respects, perhaps. But a damned efficient record for coolness and brains under the toughest conditions of convoy packet duty.

"This is most cleverly charted, sir."

Young Keller looked up. His glance was admiring. "This is most cleverly charted, sir. I see you have taken in every possibility of change that might become necessary."

"Have to," Dawson said. "We'll have to keep 'em guessing. For it's certain that we won't leave port without their being notified of it by fifth column work here on Farisha."

Second Officer Keller's youthful features went grim. And there was a sudden remarkable transition in his appearance. He looked quite hard and thoroughly competent.

Dawson rose, pushing the chart across to Keller.

"Take this up to the bridge with you," he said. "Place it under lock in the chart cabinets. Warn First Officer Reynolds not to let anyone but the three of us within reach of it. That's all. We're getting under way when darkness falls."

Young Keller snapped a salute, and Dawson returned it, smiling.

WHEN Keller had gone, Dawson poured himself a hooker of junovian brandy, downed it in a gulp, and smacked his lips appreciatively. He walked over to his bunk where his uniform lay spread for him. Casually, he ran his fingers over the gold braid on the sleeves, indicating his Master's rating. He grinned, then, and began to peel his wrinkled linen tunic top from his massively muscular torso.

Dawson had just removed the tunic top and tossed it casually to the corner of his bunk when another knock sounded on his stateroom door. He sighed.

"Come in," he called.

A Space Marine, one of the members of two divisions of them stationed at Farisha, entered the stateroom. He held a portfolio in his left hand, and snapped a salute with the other.

"From General Selwin, sir," he said.

Dawson, frowning, took the portfolio, and the Marine left. Moving back to the big table in the center of his stateroom, Dawson placed the portfolio on it, and opened a small, sealed envelope which had been attached to the front of the case. There was a note.

"Dear Captain Dawson:

Place these papers in the safest place conceivable. They are exceedingly valuable and must not fall into enemy hands should you fail in your mission. In such event, I feel confident that I can count on you to destroy them whatever the risk.

Best of good luck,
S. Gen. R. J. Selwin, F.S.A."

Dawson reread the note gravely, then tore it meticulously into tiny fragments. He dropped these into the basket by his chart desk and picked up the portfolio. He looked around the room for a moment, then stepped over to the bulkhead of his stateroom where a picture hung innocently.

Pushing the picture away, Dawson revealed a small, square, reinforced *duralloy* compartment which was

slotted with numbers in a one line sequence. He ran his fingers along the numbers, pressing six of them several times in this operation. The *duralloy* door slid automatically open, revealing the interior of a tiny safe. Dawson placed the papers in there, closed the door, and slid the picture back in place after making cetrain that the panel was fast.

He was frowning as he moved back to his bunk to resume his dressing. Frowning still, as he tried to imagine what invaluable information that portfolio contained. . . .

The waiting room in Farisha's space port was crowded with women, children, soldiers, and a few serious faced, intent gentlemen from the state and diplomacy corps of the interplanetary base.

At one end of the room was a wide ramp, fronted by a wharf from which small space launches picked up passengers to carry them out across the harbor to the waiting bulk of the luxury liner *Astera*.

The scenes of parting were for the most part grimly restrained as soldiers bade farewell to wives and children. Occasionally, however, over the intense hum of strained conversation throughout the depot, there came the sound of a woman's sobs, or a child's crying.

PERHAPS fifty yards from the embarkation ramp, Space General Roger J. Selwin stood quietly talking to a tall, slim, gray-eyed girl, who was wearing a red tunic smock that contrasted attractively with her long, ash-blonde hair.

"This is the best thing, Dana," the Space General was saying gravely. "I hate to see you go, and I'd never have brought you along when I took this command, had I imagined the situation would turn out as it did."

Dana Selwin's clear gray eyes were understanding, her piquant features lovely and sympathetic. Her voice, when she answered her father, was low and coolly liquid.

"That's all right, Dad. I understand perfectly. I—I'd like to stick by—no matter what happens. And I do feel somehow as if I'm running out on you. But since this is the only way you'll have it, the only way that will please you, I'll carry out your orders like a space trooper. I ought to have enough family heritage from the fighting Selwin clan to do that." She made an effort at a smile.

General Selwin put his arm fondly around the girl's shoulder.

"You're as grand a little trooper as your mother was, Dana," the General said huskily.

Through the address system from the ramp, a voice boomed with mechanical monotony.

"Group Seven! Group Seven! Group Seven! Aboard!"

Dana looked up quickly. An empty space launch, manned by its nattily-clad crew, was sliding up to the ramp on its return from its last load to the *Astera*.

Dana looked up quickly

Her father saw it.

"Your traveling gear all checked with the stewards, Dana?" he asked.

The gray-eyed, ash-blonde beauty nodded. Then, suddenly, she threw her arms warmly around the General, brushing a kiss across his cheek and burying her head against his military tunic to keep her tears from him.

"Good luck, Dad. Give 'em the very hottest hell!" she said muffledly.

The General's eyes were moist, and he was thankful that his daughter couldn't see it. He patted her fondly on the back.

"You bet we will, Dana darling. We'll give 'em every last bit of hell at our disposal. Goodbye, now, darling. You'd better hurry, or you'll miss a seat in your launch group."

Dana Selwin looked up swiftly, forcing a smile through her tears, and kissed her father resoundingly on the cheek. Then she was moving swiftly away from him toward the ramp, looking back over her shoulder to wave every other step.

Space General Selwin choked back the lump in his throat as he waved back at his daughter when she paused before entering the space launch. He was still waving as the launch left the ramp. His eyes were moist. . . .

ON the *glassicade* enclosed promenade deck of the luxury space liner, *Astera*, a man and a woman stood side by side, looking out over the railing at the small space launches darting up to the reception ramp.

They were the two who had conversed earlier that day in the girl's room in Farisha's Royal Hotel.

"There's more of them than I imagined," the girl said in an oddly soft voice. "And I didn't think there'd be so many children."

The thin, beady-eyed man with the sharp features and the black, waxed moustache, glanced worriedly at the girl.

A man and a woman stood at the rail

"Don't let it throw you," he advised scornfully.

"You're sure that nothing will happen to these wives and children?" the girl asked, disregarding his comment. "You're sure that the ship'll just be stopped, searched, the papers taken and that's all?"

The beady-eyed chap glared at her. "Of course. I told you that a dozen times already. Stop going gray over it."

"I'm not. It's just that, well— I'd die if I thought those poor little tykes would be—"

Her companion cut in. "That's a laugh. Sally Lester gone soft and motherly alluva sudden!" He chuckled harshly.

The girl's dark eyes blazed at him. "What we're doing, I have reasons for doing. Or at least my conscience isn't bothered much by it. But if I thought that what we were doing would put the lives of those kids in—"

The sharp faced chap cut in again. "Can it, Sally. I told you straight about it, so forget it."

The girl's eyes were still wrathful. "By God, Jed Tolber, if you've lied to

me, you'll not live long to regret it!"

The man she'd called Tolber forced a smile. His pale eyes went slate yellow. He touched the waxed tips of his black moustache.

"Calm down, baby. I gave you the straight dope."

This seemed to reassure Sally Lester. She stared silently out through the *glassicade* enclosure.

Jed Tolber cleared his throat after a moment.

"How about Dawson?" he asked. "Doncha think you oughtta get to work on him as soon as possible?"

"Don't worry about that," the girl said evenly.

"It'll take a little time," Tolber protested. "Why doncha get started now?"

"It won't take much time."

"But I thought you hated his guts," Tolber said. "I thought the last time you and him were together you both had a blowup!"

"I didn't say that," Sally said quietly. "I just said I hated his guts. We never had a blowup. I was the one who blew up, not Dawson."

"You gave him the air?"

Sally Lester shook her head. "It wasn't that. I wish to God it had been, though. I wish he'd been mine so that I could have given him the air, the louse!"

"Ahhh," Tolber smirked. His silence was a leer.

"That's right," the girl said softly. "I was wild about him, and got the idea he felt the same. He didn't. I've hated him ever since."

Tolber's expression changed. "Then how'll you get to first base with him now?" he demanded.

"He likes me a lot," Sally Lester's voice emphasized the verb with acute distaste. "He'll be glad to see me. I know that much. I'll take care of the rest."

Jed Tolber considered this thoughtfully. His voice was definitely menacing when he finally spoke.

"You better, baby. You better take care of the rest."

Sally Lester, staring moodily out over the railing, didn't reply.

Jed Tolber coughed harshly, choking it off with his handkerchief. He turned to leave.

"See you at dinner, baby," he said.

Sally Lester didn't turn to watch him leave. . . .

CHAPTER III

THE main dining salon on the luxury liner, *Astera*, was devoid of its old grandeur and sparkling glitter on the evening of the giant space ship's departure from Farisha.

Where once had been exquisite martian silver service and immaculate linen nappery, there was now but row upon row of bare wooden tables flanked by benches of the same grim nakedness. Where before there had been scraping and bowing stewards and waiters, turned ont in splendid tunics of crimson and silver braid, there were now only grim, khaki-tunicked mess attendants who served rations to all in the vast salon in impartial portions.

This large dining place had once been reserved exclusively for the first class passengers of the *Astera*, and there had been other and less elaborate eating salons for second and third class voyagers. But the latter had been converted into sleeping quarters for those unfortunate enough to have made reservations on the vessel too late, and this huge salon was now serving as a community mess hall.

There was one resemblance to former custom, however, and that was in the five "ship's" tables that were presided over, in descending rank, by the

Captain, his First Officer, Second Officer, Third Officer, and Chief Steward.

These tables were near the front of the hall, fronting a podium which had once borne a dance orchestra. The Captain's table, the smallest and foremost of this group, was, at the moment, devoid of its presiding spirit, Harlan Dawson. But even though he had not yet arrived, the dozen or so who had been selected to dine there were already engaged in pleasantly casual conversation.

There were several members of the state and diplomatic service at this table, three or four merchants who had previously been prominent residents of Farisha; and four women, three of whom were middle aged and dowdy, and the fourth of whom was the lovely, ash-blonde daughter of General Selwin.

Dana Selwin, of course, was the center of masculine attention. For not only was she young and beautiful, but also, as the daughter of the commander of Farisha, a source of highly authentic opinion on the state of Farisha in general, and the attitude of its defenders in particular.

"I really couldn't see any reason for undue anxiety about the situation," a pale young man, a member of the diplomacy staff, was saying intensely to the girl. "We overestimate the Venusian mind."

"The Venusian mind," said Dana quietly and a little wearily, "is cunning, swift to seize advantage of a situation, and schooled to treachery. It is not a good mind, in the moral sense of the word, but it is most certainly a dangerous mind to have against one as an enemy."

"I can't agree with that, Miss Selwin," one of the merchants, red-faced, sixtiesh, and pot-bellied, declared in a bull-like voice. "There were many Venusians on Farisha engaged in business there. Time after time I found my contemporaries and I were far quicker and more mentally agile than the Venusians in the business dealings we had with them. They are a stupid lot. We overestimate them."

DANA SELWIN was about to reply to this when a voice broke in behind her.

"You're quite definitely full of wind, my friend," said the voice. It was deep, rich, powerful. "You and countless other smug asses on Farisha were victims of the most subtle form of Venusian propaganda. For years, while you made money from the Venusians on the base in business dealings, and developed a friendly, warm tolerance toward them because you could gain from them in commerce, they were laughing up the sleeves of their tunics, gathering countless thousands of bits of information about you, the Federation, and Farisha itself. They were spies. The money you made from their business bungling was deliberately lost by them to lure you into false complacency and a smug contempt for their ability. It was worth it to them to lose that money to spread their propaganda and gain precious information."

The speaker behind Dana had moved around to the front of the table as he talked. And he delivered his last sentences facing them all, smiling affably, before pulling back his chair and seating himself at their head. He was Harlan Dawson, Master of the *Astera*, resplendent, now, in his fresh white linen tunic and glittering gold braid.

There was a moment of silence from all. The merchant who'd been contradicted by the Captain was gaping in stunned, flushed confusion. His eyes appraised Dawson with embarrassment and a grudging admiration at the unquestionably impressive mien of the

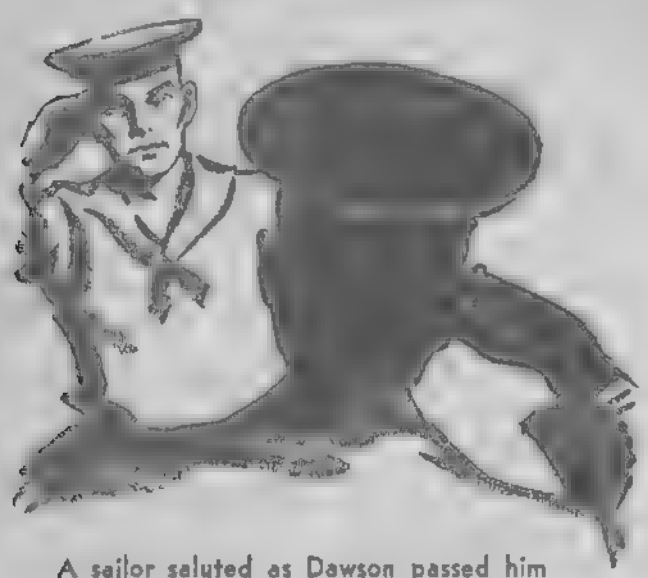
man who had so humbled him verbally.

Dawson broke the silence by flashing a white grin at Dana Selwin.

"Don't you agree with me, Miss Selwin? I feel that was what you might have replied if you hadn't been restricted by the fact that you're a lady."

Dana Selwin suddenly smiled back. She liked this big shouldered man with the ebon black hair and the crooked grin. There was something very genuine about him. Something very clean.

"Yes, Captain," she agreed. "I'm



A sailor saluted as Dawson passed him

afraid I'd have had to answer a little less explicitly."

"Just as I thought," Dawson smiled. He turned to the red faced merchant. "Miss Selwin is an unusually reliable source of information concerning Farisha, you see. And, incidentally, if you hold the Venusian mind and ability in such contempt, my friend, why are you now aboard a vessel that is fleeing the base?"

The pale young man from the diplomacy staff spoke up.

"As for me, I'd still be on Farisha this moment if I hadn't received orders to the contrary." His tone was indignant.

Dawson's dark eyes flashed, lanced with the pale young man's, as he stared the speaker down.

"Some people invariably have to be told what to do," Dawson declared matter-of-factly. "And it's a good thing for them, at times, that they must respond to orders."

The pale young man flushed and returned to his food. A middle-aged woman tittered. There was a low hum of conversation, in the middle of which the merchant Dawson had censured, rose and pushed back his plate.

"In the future, Captain Dawson," he said angrily, glaring around the table, "I'd appreciate it if I were seated at some other table."

Dawson grinned. "Sure," he said. "Why not?"

The merchant strode angrily off. The pale young man from the diplomacy corps looked as if he were about to say something, then he seemed to change his mind and returned to his food.

DAWSON looked around the table, the crooked grin still on his face. His eyes returned to Dana Selwin.

"I've served aboard the *Astera* for only six voyages," he explained. "Somehow I don't seem to fit into the social pattern necessary for an officer on a luxury space liner." His statement was one of amused self-analysis, not apology.

Dana Selwin smiled. "I always thought it was so unfortunate that so many first rate space officers never rose to the posts they deserved because they weren't grooved to pink tea patterns."

Dawson nodded agreement. "Always one of my pet peeves," he said. "They get their officer material from the hardest, toughest sort of background. Men who learn their trade from the bottom up. They're scarred and seamy by the time they're ready for big commands, but find themselves passed over for lack of dancing ability." He looked around the huge salon. "But this situa-

Sally Lester

tion," he waved his hand to indicate the bare, grim aspect of the room, "is different. Hence you find yours truly, a packet and tramp ship skipper if there ever was one, in command."

Dana Selwin laughed. "You aren't so terribly seamy, Captain. And I rather have a hunch that you can be very well aware of the social niceties whenever it pleases you."

Dawson's eyes twinkled.

"I'll take that as a compliment, even though I'm not at all certain that it is one."

He rose suddenly, bowed an apology. "I'm afraid that you'll have to excuse me. We're about ready to get under way." He addressed his words to the group at his table, but his eyes were on Dana. "I'll see you all later," he concluded.

Dawson turned and made his way out of the salon, and as he moved through the rows of tables filled with passengers, he was conscious of the stares that followed his progress.

"I don't blame them," Dawson told himself. "They're trying to figure out what sort of a guy holds their life in his hands."

When he stepped out onto the deck, Dawson could already feel the vibration of the huge atomic motors in the bowels of the ship. He moved quickly along the dimly lighted promenade deck until he came to the companionway leading to the bridge.

A sailor was stationed at the foot of the companionway, an atomic pistol strapped to his side, and he saluted as Dawson passed him and started up the steps to the bridge.

Dawson realized that young Keller had probably placed the guard before the bridge companionway, and made a mental note in favor of the young Second Officer's competence.

Keller was waiting for him when Dawson stepped onto the bridge. The young Second was bending over a chart table, checking course bearings against the maze of instruments on the *teleflash* panels before which sat three space guidesmen.

"Ready to get under way, sir," Keller said, turning.

"Good," Dawson told him. "Are your checks made?"

Keller nodded. "Yes, sir. All but our infra-blue running lights have been extinguished. The Chief Atomic Engineer is standing by for signal."

Dawson moved behind the three separate sets of directional controls behind which the three space guidesmen sat. He glanced over the shoulder of each, briefly checking the instruments before them. Then he turned back to Keller.

"Signal," he ordered.

Keller's hand found the communication signal switch, and an instant later the tremendous power of forward atomic speed hummed to life.

DAWSON stepped before a luminous, level course board. On its

surface was shown a radio-reflection of the space harbor and the vessels in it. The *Astera*, largest of the ships in the harbor, moved blackly forward on the course board toward the harbor exit. Dawson studied the progress of his craft.

"Up speed," Dawson commanded quietly an instant later.

Keller touched a second signal switch, and the response from the Atomic Engine Room was instantaneous. The black radio-reflection on the course board moved more swiftly through the harbor.

"Check with First Officer Reynolds on the forward station," Dawson commanded. "Get his harbor clearing readings. We're moving out."

Swiftly, competently, young Keller stepped across to a communico-board. An instant later he was talking with the First Officer from the forward station, relaying the clearing readings to the space guidesmen at their stations.

Dawson smiled quietly to himself as the black outline that represented the *Astera* moved easily through the space harbor lock. He had a good crew, he reflected. Practically hand picked. And beneath him was one of the fastest ships in this interplanetary belt. He turned to Keller.

"Up full speed," he commanded.

Young Second Officer Keller touched the last signal switch, and the *Astera* woke into furious life as it screamed out through the harbor locks and into the blackness of the void . . .

CHAPTER IV

IN Sally Lester's quarters, several hours after mess had been served to the *Astera's* passengers in the main dining salon, Jed Tolber paced nervously back and forth before the lounge on which the raven haired girl sat.

"Dawson will be coming off the bridge pretty soon," Tolber declared in his nasal tenor. "He'll probably go right to his quarters. That'll be your chance."

"You're certain he has the papers there?" Sally Lester asked.

Tolber nodded. "Of course. It's the most likely place of all. I know they were delivered to him there before the *Astera* left port. He's not the kind to trust their safekeeping to the ship's safe, and I'll give odds that he's taken personal charge of 'em."

"And how am I supposed to crack his safe?" the girl demanded.

Tolber gave her a scornful glance.

"How're you supposed to?" He snorted. "Listen, baby, that's your job. You'll have a necklace you want him to keep personally for you until the trip is over. Get it? You tell him you never trusted ship's safes, and besides you'd like it if he'd do you the favor of tucking it away in his own quarters."

"Dawson isn't stupid," the girl said.

Tolber's expression grew angry.

"But you ain't either, baby," he said. "Or at least you're not supposed to be. Remember that. It's going to be strictly up to you to get those papers."

"How about the Venusian interception of the *Astera?*" the girl asked.

Tolber looked cunning. "That's all arranged. Matter of hours. I've taken care of it. Dawson'll be plenty surprised to find out that in spite of his clever course plotting and super-fast ship his hand has already been tipped."

"How?" Sally Lester asked.

Tolber grinned. "That ain't your end of the deal, baby. How I arranged it was my job. Now you do yours."

"Why don't the Venusians who'll intercept the *Astera* crack Dawson's stateroom safe, if you're certain that the papers are there?"

Tolber touched the waxed tips of his black mustache in impatient annoyance.

"Any attempt to crack that safe would mean that the papers inside would be destroyed by chemicals before you could get to 'em. That's why we gotta do it this way."

"And when I get the papers?" the girl asked.

Tolber stopped pacing. He faced the girl, his eyes cold.

"How many times do you have to bring up that theme?" he demanded. "If I told you once I told you a hundred times that nothing's gonna happen. The *Astera's* passengers and crew won't get hurt none if they behave themselves. All that matters is the papers."

"Dawson won't take the interception lying down," the girl said.

Tolber nodded, smirking. "Supposing he doesn't?" he demanded. "That's his worry. And besides, his hide shouldn't be no concern of yours, baby. Don't forget, you hate his guts."

The girl rose. Her eyes were suddenly hard.

"You aren't fooling," she said grimly.

Tolber seemed pleased. He eyed the girl speculatively.

"That's the way I like to hear you talk," he told her.

Tolber turned and moved to the door, then. He stood there a moment, smiling as if at some secret joke.

"I'll leave now," he said. "You wait here a little longer, then take a stroll up to Dawson's quarters. He should be off the bridge by then. Good luck, baby."

He paused an instant to put a small paper packet on the table by the door.

"You'll need these," he said, "for Dawson's drink."

Tolber left.

Sally Lester moved slowly over to the table. She picked up the small paper packet. There were three tiny, round pills in it. She stared at it speculatively a moment, turning it over in her hand. Then she broke it open and slipped two of the pills into her tunic blouse pocket.

She walked over to the mirror above the lounge and began to arrange her raven hair. Her hands were a trifle unsteady.

"It's been a long time, Harlan Dawson, you lousy lug," she muttered between set, white teeth. "A very long time."

She picked up a package of cigarettes and lighted one none too steadily. The first few draughts composed her somewhat . . .

HARLAN DAWSON entered his cabin stateroom tiredly, closing the door behind him and moving over to the small, duralloy bar cabinet in the corner.

He brought forth a glass and a bottle of junovian brandy, taking them over to the table in the center of the room.

Stripping off his white tunic coat, Dawson threw it carelessly on his bunk, pulled up a chair before the table, then moved over to the picture on the stateroom bulkhead where his personal safe was concealed.

He moved the picture back, revealing the safe. He ran his fingers along the number sequence slots, pressing the combination digits, and the duralloy door of the reinforced compartment swung automatically and noiselessly open.

Dawson stepped to his bunk and picked up his tunic coat, bringing it back with him to the safe. There he took several envelopes of small portfolio size from the pockets, removed several more from the interior of the safe, sorted them a moment, transferred several, and then threw his tunic coat back onto the bunk.

He was shutting the safe when a knock came

He was in the process of shutting the safe panel when a knock sounded on his stateroom door.

Dawson had barely framed the words, "Just a moment," when the stateroom door opened without further hesitation.

A girl stood there. A raven haired girl, with a slim lovely figure and attractive features that were a trifle too hard.

"Sally!" Dawson exclaimed. "Sally Lester—well I'll be damned!"

Sally Lester smiled.

"Hello Har," she said. "It's been a long time, eh?"

Dawson suddenly remembered the safe. He grinned from it to the girl.

"Just a moment, kid. Take a seat. You caught me in the act of being very secretive. I was closing this thing."

"I won't peek," Sally Lester smiled. "If you think you can't trust me. But can't you drop your big responsibilities long enough to buy a girl a drink?" Her tone was taunting.

Dawson slid the picture back over the still open safe.

The girl moved to meet him, one hand outstretched.

"Shake hands," she said, "like friends. Remember? You said that's what we were going to be to one another. Just friends."

Dawson took her outstretched hand and drew her toward him.

"I can still kiss you like a sister, Sally," he laughed. "Especially since it's been so long."

He planted a kiss on the girl's temple and released her, waving to the table.

"Sit down, kid. Sit down and tell me all about yourself. What've you been doing since I saw you last? Hell, I hadn't any idea you were aboard. Why didn't you let me know sooner?" He picked up a chair and swung it over to the other side of the table, went to the bar and brought forth another glass.

Apparently not aware that the girl hadn't answered him yet, Dawson took a seat across from her.

"Still dancing, kid?" he asked.

Sally nodded. "I still have my act, Har. But now I'm like everyone else aboard, getting out of Farisha while the getting's good."

Dawson filled two glasses and chuckled.

"Here's to you, kid," he told her. "Remember that sweet parting we had in Kruzar, two years ago?"

Sally Lester smiled. "I caught you on the shoulder with a bottle of this stuff," she said, raising her glass. "I told you I never wanted to see your big grinning mug again in all my life." She laughed.

Dawson rubbed his shoulder ruefully.

"Kid, you were at a boiling pitch. What was it about?"

Sally Lester's eyebrows raised faint-

ly, but she forced a smile.

"Don't you remember?"

DAWSON laughed. "Oh, sure. That's right. Now I recall. You'd gotten a sudden complex for wedding bells, wasn't that it? You got some damned idea that you were nuts about Har Dawson." He laughed again. "I'll bet that was like the rest of your moods, kid. It probably didn't last any longer than the next day."

"It lasted a little longer than that, Har," Sally said quietly.

But Dawson hadn't noticed the expression in her eyes that accompanied the words. He was still reminiscing.

"I remember I decided that I'd save you from yourself. I got a berth as a Second on the *Ventura* the next morning and shipped out of Kruzar the next noon. Hell, kid, that was funny, wasn't it?"

Sally Lester nodded, her laugh imperceptibly brittle.

"I was awfully sore that night, you lug."

"When I hit Kruzar again," Dawson continued, "you'd left. I couldn't find out for where to save my life. Checked everywhere. They all said they didn't know where you'd gone. I was afraid then that you might have still been in your wedding bell mood and picked another mug about like me to get emotional over."

Sally shook her head, taking a long drink from her glass.

"No, Har." she told him. "There wasn't another mug."

Dawson refilled their glasses. "That's swell, kid. I'm glad to hear it. Here's to the fact that you're still eligible to make some lucky guy a helluva fine wife."

"You mean that, Har?" Sally asked, raising her glass and her gaze to meet Dawson's.

Harlan Dawson nodded soberly. "I mean it, Sally. You're a peach of a kid. You know I've always thought that. Nothing would make me happier than to know that you found a man good enough to deserve you. And, honey," he concluded, "when that day comes, I'll be space burned and void crazy if you don't have me there as best man."

Something that had flickered into Sally Lester's eyes for that brief instant now faded.

"Thanks, Har," she said thinly. Her smile was forced. "I'll issue a special invitation to you."

"No one in mind as yet?" Dawson asked, downing his second drink.

Sally Lester shook her head. "No one as yet, Har." She drained her drink, coughing slightly.

"Whatever made you come to Farisha in the first place, kid?" Dawson asked.

Sally continued to cough.

"Can't you get me a wash for this, Har?" she asked suddenly. "You ought to know that I was never as good at downing this stuff as you were."

Dawson rose, grinning apologetically. "Sure, Sally. Sorry I didn't think of it. Hold on a minute and I'll soothe that throat of yours." He turned away, starting for the cabinet bar in the corner of the stateroom.

Sally Lester's hand suddenly went to her tunic blouse pocket, bringing forth two tiny white pills. Swiftly, her glance on Dawson's back as he bent to bring a bottle from the cabinet, she dropped the round pills into his glass.

Dawson returned with the bottle, and Sally Lester was lighting a cigarette, her eyes purposely avoiding his.

He sat down again, opening the bottle and pouring some of it into the girl's glass.

"This is smooth carbonate, kid," he

Sally Lester dropped the pills in his glass

said. "Makes the lousiest liquor go down like nectar. A swell mix. I picked up a couple of cases of it in Neprokla a few months back."

Sally lifted her glass, tasted her drink. She smiled at Dawson.

"That's swell, Har. Thanks. More like it." She no longer coughed.

DAWSON found a small, thin junovian cigar and lighted it, sitting back, smiling crookedly.

"You don't know how swell it is to see you again, kid," he said. "I've thought about you a lot. We had a lot of good times together, eh?" His hand went to his glass, and he turned it around on the table several times, looking at the girl.

"You haven't changed a lot," Dawson decided. "A little thinner, perhaps. A trace of strain on your face that wasn't there before. Everything been going all right?"

"It's been fine, Har," the girl said quickly. "Everything's been swell. Honestly. The—the war, and everything gets everyone these days, I guess." She was making an effort to keep her eyes from Dawson's glass.

"It's a helluva mess," Dawson agreed. "Misery for the innocent and the helpless. Always has to be that way. But, by God, those little Venusian swine will pay through their flat noses this time."

Sally Lester raised her glass.

"Here's to victory," she said.

Dawson raised his glass to hers. "To the Federation," he said.

Holding her own glass to her lips, the girl watched Dawson down his drink in a swift gulp. Then Dawson had brought his empty glass back hard upon the table and was looking at her in surprise.

"Toasts ought to be simultaneous, kid," he said in mock rebuke.

Sally Lester flushed, and in a gesture almost comparable to Dawson's threw her head back and drained her drink in a long, steady gulp.

"Atta girl," Dawson grinned. "A trifle late, but all there."

He reached for the brandy bottle and refilled both glasses, spilling a little when he came to his own. His hand shook slightly as he put the bottle back on the table, and even more so as he reached for the carbonate bottle to complete the girl's drink.

Sally Lester watched him breathlessly now.

Dawson's face had gone flushed, and now was paling rapidly. He put his hand to his tunic shirt collar.

"It's hot in here," he said. "Hot as hell. Notice it?"

Sally Lester shook her head.

"What's wrong?" Dawson said. His words were getting thick now. "What's wrong? Why are you looking at me like that?"

He pushed back the table suddenly and rose lurchingly to his feet.

Sally Lester rose with him, standing back, watching Dawson teeter uncertainly, his big hands fast to the table for support.

"What's wrong?" Dawson grunted, his words now almost unintelligible. He released his grip on the table and swayed toward Sally, both hands outstretched, trying to place them on her shoulders.

"Sally!" Dawson mumbled. "Good God, kid, what've—"

The words trailed off meaninglessly and he half stumbled toward the girl, his arms suddenly around her, his head buried on her shoulder.

Neither the girl nor Dawson heard the knocking on the stateroom door. And it was repeated several times before the door opened inward.

THEN Dawson, the room whirling and a thick fog enveloping his last fragments of consciousness, saw the blurred outline of the girl standing in the doorway. The blurred outline focused, then, just long enough for Dawson to see Dana Selwin's shocked, slightly disgusted features.

Sally Lester had half turned as she heard the door open.

And now she, too, was aware of the lovely blonde girl looking at them in amazed disgust. Sally's arms were around Dawson now, and she was making every effort to keep him on his feet.

In the door, Dana Selwin regarded the spectacle, the table, the bottles and glasses, Dawson and the raven haired girl.

"I'm very sorry," she said tightly. "I had no idea I would interrupt."

Then she was gone, the stateroom door slamming behind her.

Dawson mumbled thickly, "Sally. . . . Dana . . ."

And then he slipped sidewards from the girl's exhausted arms and crashed unconscious to the floor.

Sally Lester stood looking down at him, her body trembling, her eyes moist and frightened.

"Oh, Har, Har," she murmured. "You big fool. You big unsuspecting fool!"

Then she stepped quickly to the wall safe, moving the picture back to reveal the open safe compartment. Quickly she withdrew all its contents, some three or four portfolio envelopes.

She glanced at these hurriedly, frightenedly, face white in growing panic. Then she opened her tunic blouse slightly, concealed them there, and buttoned it again.

Sally Lester paused once at the door of the stateroom to gaze down at the unconscious figure of Harlan Dawson sprawled there on the floor.

Then she opened the door, stepping out onto the enclosed deck section, adjusted the catch lock mechanism, and closed it hard behind her.

She turned, then, and hurried off down the deck . . .

CHAPTER V

JED TOLBER, in his stateroom quarters, nervously crushed out his sixth cigarette in less than an hour and looked up sharply as he heard footsteps once again sounding on the deck outside.

He crossed to the door, waiting tensely there as the steps grew louder.

The footsteps stopped, and two sharp knocks sounded on the door.

"Yes?" Tolber demanded.

A girl's voice, faint but recognizable, answered in obviously strained agitation.

"Hurry. Let me in."

Tolber opened the door a crack, and Sally Lester pushed it wider, striding

quickly past him into the room.

Tolber slammed the door shut and wheeled to face the girl.

"You have them?" he demanded.

Sally Lester nodded, white-faced, turning her back a moment.

When she turned back again, she had four portfolio envelopes in her hand. She gave them to Tolber who glanced at them in swift satisfaction.

"They were all in the safe," she said. "I took them all, rather than run the risk of getting the wrong ones."

"Good," Tolber nodded in satisfaction. He shoved them into his tunic pocket.

The girl lighted a cigarette with swift, jerky unsteadiness. She began to pace the floor agitatedly.

Tolber watched her a moment, a smirk touching the corners of his thin mouth.

"What about Dawson?" he asked.

"Out cold," the girl said. "He's on the floor of his cabin."

Tolber nodded a second time in satisfaction. Then, smirking more obviously, he said: "You don't seem too happy about it all, baby."

Sally Lester stopped pacing to glare at him.

"What the hell do you think I'd be?" she demanded. "I was in love with him—once. This will ruin him. This will break him. He'll never get another command after this."

Tolber shrugged, still smirking. "So what? What could be better from your viewpoint?"

The girl looked at him levelly for an instant, her eyes mirroring smouldering anguish.

"I don't know," she said quietly. "I don't know."

Tolber stepped to the door, opening it and peering out up and down the enclosed decks. Then he stepped back in and spoke to the girl.

"Get back to your own quarters," he said. "Stay there until I come to get you. Don't come out onto the decks no matter what seems to be breaking. Get me?"

Sally Lester nodded.

"There's gonna be plenty breaking inside of another hour," Tolber promised her. "One of the men aboard has been in touch with the Venusian ship on secret band for the last two hours."

THE girl stopped.

"The Venusians are near us?" she asked.

Tolber smiled unpleasantly.

"Very near. Much nearer than your friend Dawson has any idea. It's a Venusian patrol cruiser. Fast enough to cut us off by slicing in on the *Astera's* course. Heavily enough armed to make the crew of the *Astera* give up any ideas about using their small cannon power to make a fight of it."

The girl went faintly pale.

"There—there won't be any bloodshed, Jed?" she asked.

Tolber shrugged. "For the last time, I'll tell you. No one'll get hurt who behaves."

The girl hesitated a moment before stepping out the door. The glance she gave Tolber was determined.

"By God, Jed," she said, "you'd better be telling the truth!"

When the girl had gone, Tolber closed the door behind her and removed the portfolio envelopes from his pocket to glance again at them briefly. His cold pale eyes glittered triumphantly as he placed them back in his pocket.

Stepping over to his bunk, Tolber took an atomic pistol out from under the matting and, opening his tunic coat briefly, shoved it into a shoulder holster.

Then he mopped his bald head with a handkerchief, coughed hackingly into it an instant later, and started in the

direction of his stateroom door . . .

YOUNG Second Officer Keller knocked once on the door of Captain Dawson's stateroom and waited patiently for an answer. There was none.

Keller knocked again, this time more loudly.

Still there was no answer from inside.

Frowning, the young Second Officer tried the knob, pressing in with his shoulder. The door refused to yield.

Keller stood there a moment, undecided, then stepped back a pace and lunged hard against the door. The tough duralloy plating was, of course, practically impregnable. And the lock mechanism almost equally so.

The young Second opened his uniform tunic coat and drew an atomic pistol from the holster at his waist.

He held the muzzle of the gun level with the lock mechanism and fired three times. Nothing remained, then, but a smouldering orange gap in the duralloy metal.

Keller pushed the door swiftly open and stepped into his Captain's stateroom, almost stumbling over Dawson's inert figure sprawled there by the door.

The young Second choked off a startled cry of amazement and turned swiftly to shut the door behind him. Then he was on one knee beside the unconscious figure of his skipper, turning Dawson's big frame over so that he lay on his back.

The odor of brandy, and a sweetish smell of something more than that, came immediately to the young officer's nostrils. Lips tight, Keller looked up at the table on which the bottles and the two glasses still remained.

He rose then, stepping over to the table.

Keller held the open brandy bottle to his nose, put it down, repeated the process on the carbonate bottle, then went on to the glasses.

After smelling Dawson's glass, the young Second put it back on the table, moved swiftly to the cabinet bar, secured a fresh glass, and returned to the table with it. He filled this to the brim with brandy, then, and moved back to his skipper's side.

Kneeling beside Dawson once again, Keller raised the captain's head until it was almost upright, forcing the brandy glass against the unconscious lips until the slack jaw fell open limply and the liquid in the glass literally poured down Dawson's throat.

Half the liquor spilled over Dawson's shirtfront, but the other half gagged down his throat, bringing back consciousness with gasping, choking effect.

Spluttering and shaking his head sickly from side to side, Harlan Dawson opened his eyes.

For a moment he stared uncomprehendingly around the room, and then up into his young Second Officer's face.

"Are you all right, sir?" Keller pleaded anxiously.

Suddenly Dawson cursed, struggling to get to his feet.

"Easy, sir," Keller implored. "You'll pass out again if you try to rise too quickly. You've been drugged, sir."

Dawson, face white with sickness and rage, permitted Keller to assist him in rising.

"I know I have, Keller," he said thickly. "Damn, I've been a fool!" He shook his head, driving the cobwebs of stupor from it, clinging to the table for support while his Second watched anxiously.

"Cold towels, Keller, and ammonia. You'll find them both in that cabinet," Dawson said.

"Damn her," Dawson muttered through set teeth while Keller stepped away to get the towels and ammonia.

"Damn her conniving little hide. She can't get away with this. There isn't a chance in the world for her to slip off the *Astera*. Did she think I was crazy? Or was she?"

KELLER returned, and Dawson pressed the iced towels to his face and forehead, inhaling freely from the ammonia valve as he did so.

Then, still a trifle unsteadily, Dawson made his way over to the wall safe. He slid back the picture to reveal the narrow little safe compartment. It was quite empty.

Keller, who had been watching his commanding officer tautly, cleared his throat.

"Shall I sound an immediate search alarm, sir?" he asked.

Dawson shook his head and staggered weakly over to his bunk. There he picked up his uniform tunic from the place where he'd carelessly thrown it. Quickly, he searched through the inner pockets.

He brought forth a small portfolio envelope, looked at it carefully, and grinned grimly.

"Try again, baby," he muttered. "You didn't look in the right place."

"What was that, sir?" Dawson demanded.

"Someone," Dawson answered tightly, "didn't get what she made so much trouble over."

"Do you want me to send out an arrest order, Captain?" young Keller asked.

Dawson shook his head. "Not yet," he told the puzzled junior officer. "I have to get any additional angles there might be on this thing first."

"Is there anything I can do, sir?" Keller asked bewilderedly.

Dawson nodded. "Get me some paper. Over there, atop the cabinet."

Keller brought him the sheaf of paper he'd indicated, and a pen.

Dawson sat down before the table and began to write swiftly.

"*My Dear Miss Selwin:*

I am entrusting this envelope to your possession in the knowledge that you will have some fairly certain idea of what it contains. No one, save my Second Officer, will have any idea that it is in your possession. I am sure I can trust you to remember that any disclosure of its whereabouts, under any circumstance whatsoever, will seriously endanger the Federation.

Destroy this letter, and conceal the envelop somewhere in your stateroom, or on your person.

Sincerely,
Harlan Dawson,
Captain, F.S.L. Astera"

Dawson folded the note, sealed it in an envelope, and handed it, with the small portfolio envelope, to his Second.

"Take this to Dana Selwin immediately," Dawson said. "You know her stateroom location, don't you?"

Second Officer Keller nodded. "Yes, sir."

"No one is to know of this matter, Keller," Dawson warned him. "Under any and all circumstances. Is that clear?"

Young Keller nodded, saluting. "Yes, sir. It is perfectly clear, sir."

"Report to me the moment you deliver it," Dawson concluded. "I'll be on the bridge."

His expression was grim as he watched Keller leave.

DAWSON waited a moment after the door closed behind Keller. He rose, then and moved to his bunk, picking up his uniform tunic coat. Before donning it, he stepped to a desk table beside the bunk, opened a drawer and brought forth an atomic pistol and

holster belt.

He strapped the belt and holstered weapon to his waist, then, and slipped into his coat. At the door of his stateroom, Dawson paused a moment, remembering the wall safe. He stepped over to it, moved the picture back, touched the number sequence slots and watched it close automatically. Then he dropped the picture back in place and let the stateroom.

In the dim light of the *glassicade* enclosed deck outside, Dawson, hesitated a moment, looking up and down the promenade. He turned to the right, then, moving up the deck toward the bridge companionway.

At the foot of the companionway Dawson halted, frowning. The man Keller had had stationed on guard there before was now nowhere in evidence.

Quickly, Dawson started up the companionway, his mind suddenly filled with a hundred ominous suspicions.

At the bridge entrance he stopped sharply, drawing in his breath in sudden horror at the scene before him.

Reynolds, the First Officer, lay dead at his feet, a blue hole burned through his forehead by an atomic pistol. Reynolds lay dead, and at the three directional controls, three spaceguidesmen slumped lifelessly forward in their seats!

Dawson didn't hesitate, he leaped toward the general alarm signal siren.

And it was at that instant that he heard the noise behind him. Heard the noise but was unable to turn swiftly enough to avoid the descending barrel of an atomic pistol which crashed down hard on the side of his skull.

Dawson felt a moment of blinding, flashing pain, and then a nausea of blackness curtained off consciousness. He fell heavily to the floor of the bridge . . .

CHAPTER VI

JED TOLBER, standing at the bridge entrance, smiled thinly.

"Good work," he told the burly spaceman standing over the inert figure of the *Astera's* captain.

There were two other spacemen behind Tolber, and now on a signal from him, they stepped around Dawson's body and moved the space-radio control board at the corner of the bridge.

Tolber stepped over to the luminous course board, glancing down at it briefly.

There on its surface was reflected a moving black tube which represented the *Astera.* In the upper corner of the board was a slightly smaller tube-like silhouette. It was moving rapidly toward a point at which it would meet the big luxury liner.

Tolber smiled.

"All on course," he declared. "We should meet the Venusian cruiser in another fifteen minutes. Send out the proper space-radio signals."

Tolber drew a small, thin code book from his inner pocket and handed it to the spaceman at the radio controls.

He turned back to the burly spacemen who had felled Dawson from behind.

"Get down there and see that the round-up of passengers moves along all right," he told him.

"Everyone?" the burly spaceman demanded.

"Of course," Tolber snapped. "Gather them together in the dining salon. Take the diplomatic staff representatives, the General's daughter, and any of the ship's officers still alive into the captain's quarters. They'll be held apart from the rest, of course. They'll be in for some heavy questioning."

The burly spaceman nodded and left . . .

WHEN young Second Officer Keller left Dana Selwin's stateroom, he stopped at his own quarters for several minutes before going to meet Captain Dawson on the bridge.

It was this delay, perhaps, which saved him from the fate of First Officer Reynolds.

On emerging from his stateroom, Keller saw the trio of oilers from the atomic engine room mustering the frightened women passengers from the cabins out onto the deck.

The young Second didn't hesitate.

His atomic pistol was in his hand instantly, and he took only the precaution of calling out to the oilers and making certain of their hostile intent when their first shots blasted at him.

Then Keller was on one knee, half concealed by a passageway turn, atomic pistol flashing through the semi-darkness as he picked off the nearest of the oilers.

Above the screams of the women and the startled curses of the remaining oilers, Keller could hear the beginning of similar confusion everywhere on the vessel.

The oilers had taken concealment behind a lifecraft after Keller's first shots had picked off their companion. And the women had taken refuge in the cabin from which they'd been driven.

Keller held fire, then, waiting for the first flash from the atomic pistols of the oilers.

Half a minute passed, and the young Second warily exposed a shoulder around the passageway turn. Both oilers fired, revealing their position, and Keller, deliberately taking aim, answered with four blasts.

One sharp scream indicated a hit, and the young Second Officer's lips went tight in satisfaction. There was another thirty seconds of silence. Then another series of shots from the remaining oiler. Keller screamed shrilly with the third.

Silence. Keller held his breath.

A minute passed. Cautiously, then, the oiler appeared around the edge of the lifecraft, moving toward Keller. The young Second waited until the oiler was less than ten feet away.

His shot caught the oiler squarely in the face, and the latter pitched forward to the deck.

Keller rose, then, stepping out from the passageway to the deck, gun still in hand. He moved around the body of the oiler.

He heard steps behind him. Heard the steps and wheeled too late. The butt of an electrorifle in the hands of the huge spaceman who had slipped out from an alcove to come up silently be-

A rifle crashed down on his neck

hind crashed brutally down on the young Second Officer's skull.

He slumped limply to the deck . . .

Dana Selwin reread Dawson's note

for the second time after young Second Officer Keller, had left her stateroom. An anxious frown was on her lovely features, and her gray eyes were troubled.

Then she turned again to the portfolio envelope the young Second had also delivered and regarded it appraisingly.

After a moment's hesitation, Dana picked up the small portfolio envelope and took it over to a small handbag lying on her stateroom writing desk.

She placed the envelope in the bag and snapped it firmly shut.

DANA spent the next several minutes pacing restlessly back and forth in the narrow confines of her stateroom, her frown even deeper and the worry in her lovely eyes more pronounced.

Suddenly, as if on a split second resolve, she turned and stepped to the door. Her hand was on the knob when she paused, seemingly remembering the handbag still on the table desk.

She crossed the room swiftly, picked it up, and started toward the door a second time.

Then it was that she heard the shots. They were unmistakable—definitely the sound of atomic pistol fire.

Shrill cries then, feminine and terrified, came faintly to her.

There was a sudden silence, while the girl, wide-eyed and frozen, stood indecisively there at the door.

Silence, still. Then two shots, answered by four more.

A sharp, masculine scream followed the fourth shot. Then there was silence once again. Seconds passed, and another series of shots blasted forth.

This time another shrill cry of a man in anguish.

Again silence. A minute passed, still half a minute more. Whitely, Dana waited.

A single shot roared out. Faintly, Dana heard the thud of a falling body. Then footsteps.

She hesitated no longer. She threw open the door and stepped out onto the deck. Looking to the right, the girl saw a sudden, frightful tableau. A huge, burly spaceman, his back to her, was raising an electrorifle butt high above his head before bringing it down on the skull of an unsuspecting Space Officer.

Dana had barely time to see the officer's white young face as he wheeled—it happened so sickeningly fast. And then the gun butt crashed down on his skull and he slipped sidewards to the deck.

Dana had half formed her instinctive scream of alarm when burly arms wrapped tightly around her from behind, and a thick, accented voice said grimly:

"Easy, sister, you're coming along with me."

Dana Selwin tried to struggle, but it was futile. . . .

SALLY LESTER crushed out another cigarette nervously on the stand by her lounge. Her features were pale, drawn, tightly tensed. Her hands worked agitated patterns on the handkerchief she carried.

The sounds of confusion, struggle, sporadic firing had been going on now for more than ten minutes. And it was obvious that they were rapidly making the girl more than distraught.

Several times she stepped toward the door of her cabin, only to turn away again, biting her full, ripe underlip in an anxiety of denial.

Once, when she heard the sharp cry of a small child, her body had tensed, then trembled uncontrollably while she fought to regain possession of her nerves.

At length the sounds of confusion

and conflict died down, or faded away —she wasn't certain which—to be replaced by another and more ominous sound.

Somewhere in the blackness of the void surrounding the luxury liner *Astera*, another space craft was approaching. And Sally didn't need the peculiar rocket vibration of that alien craft to identify it for her.

"They're coming," she told herself again and again. "They're coming. Oh, God, and I'm responsible for part of this hell that's loose!"

A knock sounded on her door, finally, and when she answered, Jed Tolber swaggered into the stateroom. His thin lips were smirking, and in his pale eyes there was a savagery the girl had never seen there till now.

"The *Astera* is ours, baby," he announced in his nasal whine. "It was as easy as shooting sparrows."

The girl put her hand to her mouth.

"How many?" she demanded hoarsely.

Tolber shrugged indifferently.

"Ten, twenty," he said.

The girl shuddered. "Women, or kids?"

Tolber's grin was slyly suggestive. "They weren't all crew members who acted up."

There was loathing and bitter self-accusation in Sally's voice as she answered.

"You didn't have to kill them," she said huskily. "Oh, God, your swine didn't have to shoot down helpless kids."

Tolber's face flushed with sudden anger.

"Listen, baby," he said harshly, "there were only sixteen of us, counting you. We were placed at the right spot and at the right moment. We weren't yellow. We took our chances. Six of us were killed in taking over this ship."

"You had the nerve centers of the ship sabotaged," the girl cried. "They didn't have a chance to resist. There was nothing but sneaking cowardice in your attack. There was no need to kill!"

Tolber's face was still flushed with anger. His pale eyes flashed cruelly, and he stepped swiftly up to the girl, catching her across the face with an open-palmed slap that rocked her back.

"Shut up!" he snarled. "Shut up before I decide I don't need you no more."

THE girl backed away, eyes fixed in horror on the gun Tolber had suddenly drawn. There was a red splotch where his slap had marked her pale features.

"You wouldn't dare!" she choked.

Tolber laughed harshly, waving the barrel of the atomic pistol in his hand.

"The hell I wouldn't," he told her. "I'm no punk agent any more. I'm a big shot. I engineered this thing, and don't think I won't be the little white-haired boy in Venus for it. There'll be plenty of pay-back coming to me for this little feat, baby. Plenty."

"You're crazy," the girl said softly. "You're out of your mind. You can't play around with rattlesnakes for long before they'll decide to bite you."

Tolber laughed chokingly, and suddenly began to cough. He reached for his handkerchief, spit into it, and put it back into his tunic pocket.

"You'd better change that tune, baby," he said menacingly. "I'm getting sick of it. And if I tell our chums certain things about you when we're boarded, they won't let you hang around alive long."

"You're a renegade louse," the girl spat. "A traitorous scum. Do you think that the Venusians will give a damn for you now that you've served your purpose?"

Tolber stepped in swiftly and slapped her hard across the mouth.

"Shut up!" he shrilled. "Who the hell do you think you are? A Federation Girl Scout? Do you think you're any less traitor than me? Do you think you aren't a renegade?"

The girl began to sob chokingly. Tolber gave her a contemptuous glance and stepped over to a liquor cabinet. He poured a stiff hooker of brandy into a fat tumbler, downed it in a gulp, and began to cough raspingly again.

He pulled out his handkerchief, spat into it once more and placed it back in his tunic pocket. Then he poured himself another large hooker of brandy. He drank this a little more cautiously, wiping his mouth on his linen tunic sleeve after he had finished.

Tolber shoved the atomic pistol into his holster, then, and turned back to the girl.

"Pull yourself together, baby," he said harshly. "I'm willing to forget that little outburst if it don't happen no more."

Tolber shoved the pistol into his holster

Sally Lester stood there unhearing, her face buried in her hands, her shoulders shaking with sobs.

A knock sounded on the stateroom door. Tolber stepped to it and opened it several feet. A burly spaceman, armed to the teeth, stood grinning in the semi-darkness of the deck.

"The Venusian cruiser is coming up to close quarters," he declared. "We better get our reception party ready for 'em."

Tolber nodded.

"You've taken those I told you about down to Dawson's stateroom?" he asked.

The spaceman nodded.

"No more resistance aboard?" Tolber asked.

"We've got the rest, crew and passengers, under guard in the main dining salon," the spaceman said.

Tolber smirked. "Good. I'll be out on deck in a minute.

He closed the door and turned back to the girl. He grabbed her by the hair and lifted her head from her hands.

He slapped her for the third time.

"Get under control," he snarled. "This is just starting."

CHAPTER VII

THE black gulf of pain that seared around Dawson's brain was growing grayish, and the fog was lifting. There was a splitting sensation of sudden nausea that passed swiftly to be followed by showering sparks of light which danced into a whirling pattern that grew larger and larger until at last Dawson blinked into consciousness.

He was aware that he lay on the bridge deck, and that a guard was standing over him. And then he raised his aching head.

The guard was a thick shouldered, blue jowled fellow. He held an electrorifle in his hands and it was pointed at Dawson's midriff. Dawson realized, then, that the *Astera's* atomic motors

had stopped, and that the vessel was motionless, held only by the turbines of its degravitation mechanism.

The bodies of the spaceguidesmen had been removed from the seats behind the directional controls, and save for the guard and Dawson, the bridge was deserted.

Dawson tried weakly to rise, supporting himself with one hand as he managed to get to one knee.

The burly guard acted viciously and without warning, bringing the butt of his electrorifle smashing down on Dawson's shoulder, knocking him to the deck once more.

"Stay there," the guard snarled. "You're less likely to make trouble that way!"

Footsteps sounded, coming up the bridge ladder.

Another hulking spaceman appeared at the bridge entrance. He was armed with two atomic pistols, strapped to either side of his waist.

"Orders are to bring this one down to his stateroom," the new arrival told Dawson's guard.

The man with the electrorifle stepped back, grinning at Dawson mockingly.

"Now get up," he told him.

Dawson rose painfully, swaying slightly, one hand pressed to the angry gash on his head.

The guard with the rifle gestured, stepping aside.

"Move ahead of me," he commanded. "And don't try no tricks."

Still swaying somewhat, Dawson lurched forward and the man with the electrorifle stepped behind him, prodding the muzzle of the weapon into his back.

The spaceman with the twin atomic pistols stepped aside as Dawson neared the bridge entrance.

"You go ahead with this one," he said. "I'll follow and make double certain there isn't no funny stuff."

At the bridge ladder, Dawson hesitated an instant, holding to the duralloy side rails while he tried to summon strength enough to fight off the dizziness assailing him.

And then he caught his first sight of the Venusian cruiser.

It was lying half a mile abeam of the *Astera*, sleek, black, ominous. Even from where Dawson stood at the bridge entrance, he could make out the grim silhouettes of the heavy guns aboard the enemy craft. They were guns which could deciminate the huge but unprotected *Astera* inside of five minutes, and undoubtedly they were at that moment trained on the big luxury space liner.

Dawson cursed bitterly.

His guard prodded him viciously with the point of the electrorifle and laughed harshly.

"You got visitors, Captain," he chortled. There was mockery in the title he used.

Dawson steeled himself, lips tight, and started down the bridge ladder. His guard followed close behind.

WHEN Dawson stepped from the ladder to the deck there was another armed spaceman waiting, and he joined his two comrades as they escorted Dawson along the dimly lighted promenade to his stateroom.

Dawson's stateroom door was ajar when they arrived there. Light poured forth from the room, and the sound of voices could be heard. His guard prodded Dawson through the doorway, and he stood there in the room an instant blinking, trying to focus his eyes to the sudden glare.

"Well, well, Captain Dawson," a nasal voice greeted him smirkingly. "So nice of you to join us."

Dawson saw the speaker, then. He was a thin, waspish man, with sharp,

rat-like features and a black, waxed moustache. His head was bald, and he mopped it with a handkerchief as he spoke.

There were others in the room, most of them cowed, badly frightened. Some six of them Dawson recognized as members of Farisha's diplomatic staff. There were two women, one standing near the thin, waspish moustached chap, and the other in the group of diplomatic officials. The first, looking at him wide-eyed and uncertainly, was Sally Lester; the second, coolly composed and apparently less frightened than the men around her, was Dana Selwin.

Dawson saw young Keller, then. The Second Officer was seated alone on the bunk side. His eyes and whitely tensed expression showed the anguish and rage he felt.

"I'm Jed Tolber, Captain Dawson," the sharp-featured, moustached fellow smirked.

"What the hell is this all about?" Dawson said evenly.

Tolber laughed. "I thought it would be so obvious you wouldn't havta ask," he said. "I—me and the boys—have taken over the *Astera* to welcome a few visitors."

Dawson stared past Tolber at Sally Lester.

"You're keeping lovely company, aren't you, kid?" he asked softly.

The girl turned away, her white teeth biting deep into her red underlip.

Dawson's eyes flicked briefly to those of Dana Selwin, and the glance they exchanged was studiously noncommittal. Then he looked back at Tolber.

"The party," Tolber said nasally, "is about to begin. I hear them coming."

He stepped to the stateroom door, pushing it open, and there was the sudden sound of footsteps coming along the deck to the cabin. Tolber was outside, now, and those in the room heard the footsteps halt and a voice, thick in Venusian accent.

"You are Tolber?"

The renegade murmured a respectful answer almost inaudibly, and the footsteps started again. Suddenly a purple tunicked delegation of Venusion Officers entered the stateroom. At their fore, beside Tolber, was a squat, thick-moustached, swarthy Venusian Vice Commander.

The group, three under officers, the Vice Commander, and Tolber, halted suddenly as the Vice Commander's eyes swept the room.

"You are Captain Dawson?" he asked, addressing Dawson.

Dawson didn't answer, but he met the swarthy Venusian's stare with cold contempt.

"Please," the Venusian Vice Commander declared silkenly, "do not be discourteous. It will make matters difficult."

He turned to Tolber.

"Give me the papers."

Eyes bright in triumph, Tolber reached into his inner tunic pocket and brought forth several small portfolio envelopes.

"The information is in one of these envelopes," he whined eagerly.

THE Vice Commander snatched the envelopes from his grasp. The silence in the room was electric while the squat Venusian Officer opened the first envelope. He looked up at Tolber, after glancing over the papers, and made a small grimace of impatience, tossing them carelessly to the floor. Then he opened the second envelope. The process was repeated, and the glance Tolber received this time was one of definite annoyance.

The Vice Commander opened the third envelope. His face went rigid in

controlled rage as he threw it aside and whirled on the ashen faced Tolber.

"Fool! None of those is what I want. Give me the correct papers instantly. I want no more of this stupid suspense!"

Tolber's mouth opened and closed in horrified amazement. His voice was a croak.

"Th— there ain't any others. Those're the papers we got. They *have* to be the right ones!"

The Vice Commander's gesture was lightning swift. He reached out, grabbing the renegade by the tunic collar with one hand, and smashing him with an open-palmed blow across the mouth with the other.

"Bungling dolt!" he raged.

He released his grasp on Tolber's collar and swung to face Dawson.

"Since he did not obtain the papers we desire, it is evident that they are in your possession," he told him.

Tolber's voice was a terrified croak

Dawson shrugged. "Perhaps."

The Vice Commander's face was livid. "Give them to me," he snapped, "at once."

Dawson regarded him contemptuously. "Go to hell, space flea."

The Venusian trembled with wrathful indignation. He turned to one of his three under officers, giving a swift, angry command in his own tongue. The under officer saluted and left the stateroom. The Vice Commander turned back to Dawson.

"I think you should change your mind, Captain, at once," he said. "Otherwise I will be forced to secure the information concerning those papers in a most unpleasant fashion."

"Keep talking, space flea," Dawson told him. "You're really amusing."

The Venusian's features went rigid in rage. His small eyes glinted.

"Very well," he rasped. "You like to be amused. We will try to please you."

The Venusian under officer returned to the stateroom, then. In his arms was a space helmet and an oxygen compression tank to which it was attached. He placed it on the floor beside the feet of the Vice Commander.

The Vice Commander turned to the two spacemen who had brought Dawson from the bridge.

"Place him in that chair, and hold him fast," he commanded, indicating Dawson.

The burly spacemen placed their weapons aside and advanced on Dawson. Had they expected resistance, they were disappointed. Dawson watched them a moment, shrugged, stepped to the chair the Venusian had indicated and sat down.

"I could prolong this," he said, "but a few shots might go astray around this room. It's less complicated this way."

THE spacemen stepped behind the chair on which he sat and seized

his arms, holding them back tightly.

"Now the helmet," the Vice Commander directed. The under officer who had brought it into the stateroom picked it up and moved over to Dawson. He slipped the reinforced *glassicade* turret down over Dawson's head, fastening the *learubber* collar tightly around his massive shoulders so that no air could escape. Then he placed the oxygen compression tank on the floor beside the chair. In another moment, he had connected the pressure hoses leading from the tank to the space helmet. He stepped back, then, his glance on his Vice Commander, who moved over beside Dawson.

The Venusian paused, his arm on Dawson's shoulder, his eyes moving around the room at the white-faced captives.

"Too much pressure in a space helmet is a nightmare of cerebral pain," he said. "We are going to apply just such pressure, in increasing doses, on Captain Dawson. If any of you should have any information which the so foolish Captain refuses to disclose, now would be an excellent time to come forth with it."

There was a silence. Then Keller's voice, hoarse, anguished, broke forth.

"You damned swine!"

The Venusian Vice Commander smiled contemptuously at the young Second Officer. Keller had risen to his feet.

"Perhaps you have such information?" he asked.

"You won't get anything from him," Keller shouted. "You'd never understand why. He's got guts. He won't talk if he dies in that damned torture!"

The Vice Commander raised his eyebrows. "We shall see," he declared. "And for the benefit of the rest of you, I must add that, should I fail to get the desired information from Captain Dawson, you will all have your turns in the helmet."

At a signal from the Venusian, then, an under officer stepped forward and picked up the compression tank. Swiftly, he adjusted the valve outlet until a steady pressure was pouring into the space helmet over Dawson.

There was silence, unbroken save for the hiss of the valve pressure as it entered the helmet. All eyes in the room were fastened on Dawson as he sat there helplessly, his expression still a crooked grin of defiance.

The tension mounted with the pressure of the oxygen entering the torture helmet. Dawson's brow was beaded with sweat now, and the crooked, defiant grin was fixed. Only his eyes betrayed the mounting pain, and they were beginning to glaze.

Suddenly the Venusian Vice Commander signaled the under officer to cut the pressure. The hissing of the valve stopped abruptly. The Vice Commander tapped on the glassicade turret of Dawson's helmet. His gestures asked his question.

Slowly, painfully, Dawson shook his head negatively.

The Vice Commander barked another order to his under officer and the hissing of the valve began again.

The grin was fading from Dawson's face now, slowly, as if the very pressure itself were forcing the corners of his mouth into a twisted pattern of pain.

A girl's voice knifed the air then in sharp anguish.

"Stop it, for God's sake. Stop it. I'll tell you what you want to know!"

The Venusian Vice Commander barked an order to his under officer. The hissing ceased. He turned to face the girl, who now stood forward, her lovely features etched in sharp lines of anguish, her eyes welling the torment of her heart.

"So?" the Venusian asked. "Please say more."

Dana Selwin bit deep into her underlip before she spoke.

"I have the papers," she choked. "Here. In my handbag!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE Venusian Vice Commander smiled triumphantly. He turned to his under officer.

"Remove the helmet," he directed. Then he stepped toward Dana Selwin, who was fumbling in her handbag and bringing forth a small portfolio envelope.

The under officer swiftly took the torture helmet from Dawson's head, and the spacemen holding his arms released them as he slumped forward only half-conscious.

"This is more sensible," the Venusian said. He extended his hand toward Dana. "Give them to me."

Dana had the envelope out of the bag now, and she held it in a strangely awkward fashion toward the Vice Commander. He stepped forward to take it.

At that instant the girl let the envelope flutter to the floor, and in the next instant, almost before anyone saw the small, snub-nosed atomic pistol in her hand, she had fired twice, straight into the chest of the Venusian.

He crumpled forward to the floor as the girl turned almost simultaneously and sent a third burst of flame at the under officer who stood by Dawson's chair. He hadn't time to drop the helmet which he still held in his arms, and his mouth opened in a scream that never reached voice as he pitched face forward, dead.

It was Keller who leaped toward the abandoned electrorifle which had been set aside by one of the spacemen who'd held Dawson. And it was Keller who, in the space of split-seconds, turned it, club-fashion, on the totally off-guard Venusian officers. He caught the first squarely on the skull with the butt of the weapon, and, even as the fellow slumped back against the wall, turned and brought the barrel of the rifle smashing in a vicious sideswipe against the remaining under officer's temple.

The room was a bedlam of shouts and curses, then, as the diplomatic officials leaped into the melee to grapple with the burly spacemen.

Dawson was on his feet, swaying weakly and hanging to the chair for support as his head began to clear. Through the dazed blur of pain that still befogged him, he could see Jed Tolber, unnoticed in the confusion, slipping around the side of the room toward the door.

Dawson cursed thickly and staggered after him. Tolber glanced over his shoulder momentarily, and saw Dawson. The atomic pistol in his hand centered on his pursuer.

Dawson saw the weapon and lurched toward Tolber heedless of it.

There was a flash of white, an anguished female scream buried in the blast of the gun, and Sally Lester, clinging weakly to Tolber's pistol arm, slumped slowly to the floor. Her white tunic was splashed red with her own blood. The shot she'd stopped, the shot meant for Dawson, had torn gruesomely through her right side.

Tolber, his weapon held fiercely in the girl's death grip, cursed wildly, trying to free his arm from her grasp. He released the pistol an instant later, realizing it was the only way he could free himself, turned and dashed toward the door.

DAWSON stared shakenly down at the crumpled body of the girl.

And then he was on his knees beside her, lifting her head to his arms, staring sickly into her white, pain-twisted features. Her eyes fluttered open briefly and she recognized him. She tried to speak, but her words were sporadic, broken.

"Tolber . . . the code book . . . Venusian . . . has it . . . message . . . get him, Har."

Her eyes closed and she went limp in his arms. Dawson knew that she was dead. Gently, he released her. Then he rose. Young Keller, electro-rifle still in his hands, came up to him.

"Are you all right, sir?"

Dawson looked dully around the room. The Venusians lay dead or unconscious. The renegade spacemen were subdued. The diplomats now carried the arms they'd seized from their captors. Eyes bright, tunics torn, they looked almost ridiculously out of place in their unfamiliar roles.

Dawson turned back to Keller.

"I've an idea that we've still a chance to get clear of this mess, in spite of the fact that the Venusian cruiser still lies out there with all guns trained on the *Astera*. There are still a few renegade spacemen loose who'll have to be mopped up. I'm counting on you to take care of that quickly, and without any action that will arouse the suspicions of the Venusians aboard that cruiser. Meet me on the bridge the instant you have the ship under our control again."

Dawson moved to the door. He paused there an instant, his eyes meeting those of Dana Selwin.

"Thanks," he said briefly. "Even for a General's daughter, you're one hell of a cool customer in a pinch. But don't take any more chances. Please stay here in the stateroom until we have this thing under control."

Then Dawson stepped from the stateroom and was moving swiftly down the promenade deck toward the bridge ladder. Tolber would be on the bridge, he knew. Tolber frantically trying to establish a space-radio communication band that would enable him to summon help from the Venusian cruiser. Tolber unaware that the highly complicated space-radio apparatus of the *Astera* was impossible to operate without two-man control.

Reaching the bridge ladder, Dawson began its ascent with silent swiftness. And even as he neared the top, he could hear the sounds of the renegade Tolber's hysterical efforts to set the space-radio in operation.

Tolber didn't see Dawson as the latter stepped through the bridge entrance. He was too frantically engrossed in his futile efforts to set the space-radio apparatus into operation.

Dawson stood there an instant, regarding the other grimly.

"Tolber!" he spat suddenly.

The thin, rat-faced renegade wheeled. His fear twisted features went ashen at the sight of Dawson. His pale eyes were wide with terror.

Dawson advanced slowly toward him.

"Damn you," Tolber croaked. "They've all their guns trained on this ship, and if you think you'll escape being blown to fragments you're crazy."

Dawson continued his approach, his big hands working in convulsive rage.

"How do you want to die, Tolber?" Dawson asked evenly. "I can break your neck or beat your brains out against a bulkhead. Take your choice."

"Don't come any nearer!" Tolber suddenly screeched. He was back hard against the space-radio panel, his hands pressed flat against its surface.

DAWSON was less than three feet from him, when Tolber's lightning gesture caught him unprepared. In a

split second the renegade's hand had flashed to his right pocket, and suddenly it came forth holding a razor-sharp, long bladed junovian brush knife.

Dawson hadn't time to step aside, and he had a swift sensation of burning pain as the knife hurled by Tolber sank deep into his right shoulder.

Then the renegade had leaped swiftly, savagely in at Dawson to follow up his momentary advantage. His claw-like hand was grasping frantically for the knife handle as Dawson staggered back.

Dawson had just time enough to bring a sweeping left squarely into Tolber's face. But the blow, delivered off balance, stayed the lunge of the renegade for only an instant. Then Tolber's hand found the knife handle, and in a twisting movement he ripped it free from Dawson's shoulder.

He stood back, then, breathing heavily, eyes flashing insanely, the bloody blade in his hand.

Tolber's next lunge at Dawson came immediately. But Dawson met it with a perfectly timed kick which caught the renegade's knife hand squarely at the wrist. His howl of pain was simultaneous with the clatter of the knife to the duralloy deck.

Then Dawson, able to use only his left hand, closed in on Tolber, catching him flush on the mouth with a vicious hook. Tolber slumped to his knees, his mouth a crimson blot from which he spat fragments of his teeth. He pawed out wildly for the knife, which lay several feet from him on the floor. Pawed out wildly and tried to rise, only to be caught in the face again by a sledge hammer left uppercut from Dawson.

Tolber slumped forward on his face, unconscious.

Breathing heavily, his shoulder a widening stain of red, Dawson bent swiftly over Tolber and searched through the renegade's tunic coat. He found the small Venusian code book he sought and rose to his feet.

Footsteps sounded coming up the bridge ladder, and Dawson turned to see Keller enter. With him were several members of the crew, heavily armed and grinning.

"Mopped up, sir," Keller said. "The *Astera* is under our control again."

Dawson touched Tolber's inert form with his foot.

"Remove this," he told the crew members. Then he turned to Keller. "Get with me on the space-radio controls here. We're sending a message to the Venusians on the cruiser, in their own code. Here," he handed the code book to Keller, "you translate it. I've only one good arm to handle my end of the controls."

Keller took the book, frowning.

"But, sir, a message to their cruiser—" he began bewilderedly.

"Tell them," Dawson said, moving to the nearest dual seat before the space-radio control board, "that everything has proceeded satisfactorily. Tell them that the Vice Commander and under officers are remaining on board the *Astera* to supervise the renegades who will act as a prize crew to bring the ship into the nearest Venusian port. Tell them to move at once to space lanes forty-three-nine seven."

Keller looked up, a grin breaking forth.

"But that is a Federation mine field," he said.

"Precisely," Dawson answered. "They'll blow their damned cruiser to bits trying to enter it." He paused to reflect a moment. "Tell them to proceed to that space lane designation immediately, and that we will follow them and meet them there. From that point on, they can convoy the *Astera* into one

of their ports."

Grinning broadly now, Keller took his place at the space-radio dual controls, and with Dawson working in conjunction with him, the apparatus was crackling forth on a communication band in the next few minutes.

Working from the code book, Keller rapidly transmitted the message.

Moments of anxious silence passed, then, while they waited for reply. It came crackling back to them in the same code some two minutes later.

"Orders received. We are proceeding to designated lanes immediately. Congratulations."

"Thank God for the unquestioning obedience of the Venusian forces," Dawson grinned. Keller joined his laughter . . .

HOURS later, after the *Astera* resumed the originally charted course, somewhere off in the void there came the faint thunder of what quite conceivably could have been the explosion of a Venusian cruiser barging unwittingly into the death trap of a Federation mine field.

And hours after that, a scant two days before the *Astera* arrived safely at Earth Port, Harlan Dawson, Captain of the vessel, and Dana Selwin stood quietly together in the semi-darkness of a deserted after deck.

"Keller told me that you insisted on taking part in the mopping up," Dawson told the girl. "For a General's daughter, you ought also to have been able to obey orders. I told you to stay in the stateroom."

Dana Selwin smiled. "But even a General's daughter is a woman. Women are very undisciplined." She paused. "And I've a further confession to make. I peeked into those papers."

Dawson grinned. "And you found out that they informed Earth Federation authorities that there was a fortune in gold bullion hidden in the *Astera's* hold, eh? The bullion carted out of Farisha before the Venusians could get it."

Dana Selwin nodded. "That's a precious cargo to carry."

Dawson shrugged. "The *Astera's* carrying an even greater treasure than that."

"Where?" the girl asked wide-eyed. "What?"

"Here," Dawson explained, taking her in his arms. "You."

FISHING WITH LEAVES

THE art of catching fish with nothing more than leaves or plants for bait and a net or one's own hands to pick up the fish is known to people throughout the world.

The plant or some part of it acts upon the fish just as an anaesthetic works on a human. The fish lose control of their movements and buoyancy when these plants are placed in the water. Some of the plants also cause the fish to rise to the surface for fresh air, but a form of paralysis sets in and they cannot submerge again. The fisherman then has only to pick the fish up or use a net if he wants a lot of fish.

After a while the effects of the plant wear off and the fish that were not taken are revived. The fish act a little "dopey" when they first come out of their stupor, but are soon normal and swim away.

Plants used for fishing vary from one place to another. The most common example are the leaves of the soap-plant and the turkey mullen plant used by the California Indians.

People in our southeastern states break the seeds of the red buckeye plant into small pieces which are thrown into the water to stupefy the fish. The sweet smell of the muchanyoko trees are used by the tribes of Central Africa to lure and catch fish. The natives of Guana use the leaves of the mazetta tree.

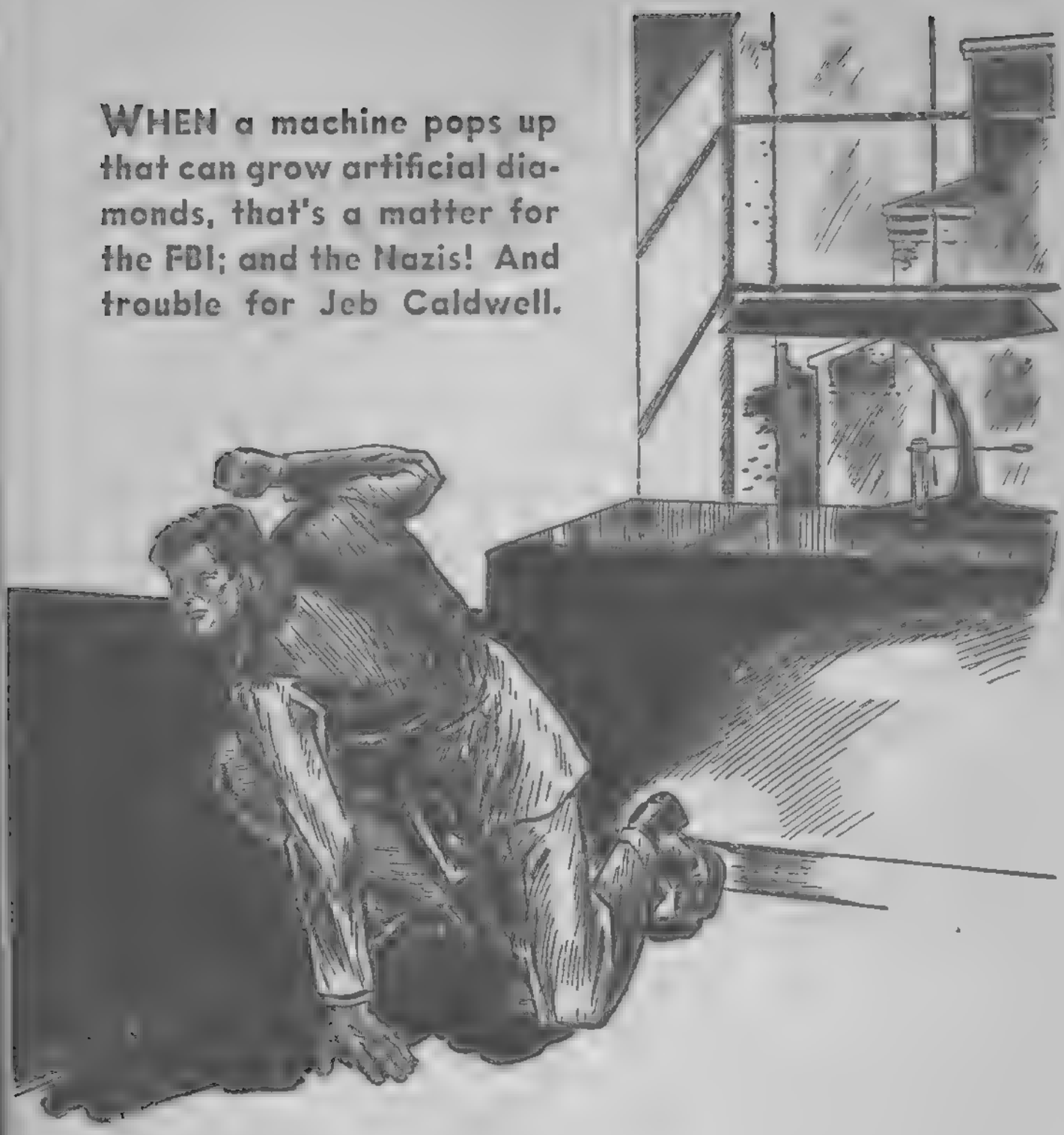
So the next time you are in the neighborhood of any of these places and you want to catch a fish for dinner in a hurry, try using a plant. Of course, it's not as much fun as catching a fighting fish on the end of your line and struggling to land him, but it's a lot less work.

NAZI DIAMOND

by RICHARD O. LEWIS

The Nazi watched the diamond grow, intent fascination on his face

WHEN a machine pops up that can grow artificial diamonds, that's a matter for the FBI; and the Nazis! And trouble for Jeb Caldwell.



THE incessant ringing of the door bell finally forced itself into Jeb Caldwell's consciousness. He turned off the machine then, picked up the diamond from the lead slab and jammed the uncut stone deep into his pocket.

It took him less than a minute to quit the laboratory, traverse an inner office and reach the small living room of his home where he opened the door leading out into the street.

A big man stood there in the bright rays of the morning sun. "I am T. R. Rendon," the man said. "Federal Investigator." He flashed a small metal badge in the palm of his large hand.

T. R. Rendon! Federal Investigator!

Those words drove a shrill note of warning through Jeb's brain. A tremor of alarm quaked through his slight body beneath its faded smock. He tried to keep his facial expression from

aging, from showing his fear, as he squinted carefully through his glasses at the big man.

T. R. Rendon, a federal agent! He was swarthy in appearance, wore a gray suit, had a bull neck. There was a small, black mustache above his full lips.

"Come . . . come in," said Jeb, trying to hold his voice steady.

He backed away from the door to let the other pass.

On the way across the living room toward the inner office, panic seized Jeb. He wanted to run. He wanted to cry out. He wanted to get away from this man. But he did none of those things; he knew it would be useless.

There were two chairs, a littered desk and a small table in the office. Jeb indicated one of the chairs for the big man and leaned back against the edge of the desk, his knees as weak as water.

"I suppose," said the man who had given his name as T. R. Rendon, "you know why I am here."

Yes, Jeb knew why the man had come. He had been expecting a visit for the past two days. But now the voice of warning was crying out in his brain, making it hard for him to think straight.

"Perhaps you had better tell *me*." He was surprised at the calmness of his voice.

The big man nodded his head, and his lips twisted into a smile. But his dark eyes kept darting about the room as if in search of something.

"I don't blame you for being careful," he said.

"Yes, it pays to be careful in times like these." Jeb was fighting hard to gain control over his shattered thoughts. Silently he was cursing the frailty of his own body. Once, a month ago, he would have been a match for this man, would have been able to overcome the fear that was gnawing at him. But, now, he felt all gone inside. His flesh held weakly to his bones, and he felt and looked much older than he actually was. He needed a rest. A *long* rest!

"And now if you will tell me why you came. . . ." Perhaps he had no reason to fear this man. Perhaps his fear was merely a result of his own weakness. But that name! *T. R. Rendon!*

THE federal agent was not smiling now. "You are making synthetic diamonds here," he said. "Diamonds of great value. They should not fall into the wrong hands."

Jeb Caldwell felt better now. Some of the fear was leaving him. But not all of it. "Perhaps you had better tell me more," he suggested.

"Right." The dark eyes were studying him. "You contacted Washington several days ago and offered to sell the process to the government for a fair sum. Two days ago, you received a letter stating that I, T. R. Rendon, would call upon you."

There was that name again. T. R. Rendon! It bothered Jeb.

"I am here to view your process," the man continued. "If it is inexpensive, and if your diamonds are all that you claim them to be, the government is ready to make a deal with you immediately."

Jeb was thinking of the *other* T. R. Rendon he had met. Ted Rendon. That was a week ago. In Washington. Jeb had gone there to show a diamond to certain officials, and Ted Rendon had been one of those officials. They had had lunch together, and Jeb had explained how he could make synthetic diamonds cheaply.

"Careful," Ted Rendon had warned

in the restaurant. "In war times, even the booths sometimes have ears."

Jeb had spoken in lower tones then, eager that the government take over his process.

"I'll get in touch with you in a few days," Ted Rendon had finished. He was a tall, slim, likable chap with dark hair and frank eyes. "I'll come to your laboratory and have a look."

Then, two days ago, the friendly letter had come from Washington, stating merely that T. R. Rendon would call soon. And this morning a man had appeared at the door, stating that *he* was T. R. Rendon!

Jeb Caldwell felt that he was all mixed up. Could there be *two* T. R. Rendons? It seemed hardly possible.

Then he got another thought. Perhaps the name T. R. Rendon was a sort of "trade" name. Perhaps certain types of government representatives never went by their own names. Perhaps several of them used the same name.

But that didn't seem to make sense either. Once again, Jeb Caldwell silently cursed his infernal weakness. He couldn't think straight.

"Your diamonds will not be put on the market, naturally," the man before him was saying. "They will be used only by industry. For national defense. Our country is putting in more machines now than ever before in its history. And those machines need cutting edges. Diamond cutting edges!"

What if this man were not even a government agent! What if he were an imposter! *A foreign agent!*

Fear welled up once more in Jeb Caldwell. It was the same fear he had experienced when he had opened the door and the man had given his name as T. R. Rendon.

But what could he do? He couldn't just run out of the house shouting that he had caught a Nazi spy! That might prove to be very silly. And there didn't seem to be anything else to do. There was not even a weapon in the house. . . .

"And now if I might inspect one of the stones," the man said. "Naturally, they must be of high grade." He was looking expectantly at Jeb.

"WHY, yes . . . yes, of course." Jeb reached into the pocket of his trousers, pulled out the uncut stone and leaned forward to hand it to the man. For a brief instant, their fingers touched as the man took the stone. Jeb's hand recoiled. The action was purely instinctive. It was as if he had touched a snake.

The man took an eye-piece from his pocket, screwed it into his eye and held the diamond to the light before him.

Jeb watched him closely. He caught the sudden change of expression that came over the man's face. But what was it? Surprise? Satisfaction? Greed? He couldn't tell.

"Why, why this is a diamond of the first water!" * the man gasped. "It's, it's one of the purest stones I have yet seen!"

"Naturally," said Jeb. "My diamonds contain only atoms of pure carbon."

The man held the stone between thumb and finger and gazed at it for a long moment. Then his glance shifted to Jeb, and there was a glint in the dark eyes.

"But how am I to know that you

*Diamonds are generally classified as being of the first, second or third water. First water diamonds are transparent and entirely free fom flaws of any kind. They may be either colorless or tinged faintly with blue. Second water diamonds are colorless with some minor flaws, or flawless with some trace of a foreign color. Third class diamonds are either clouded by gas- or moisture-pores or contain other serious defects.—Ed.

actually *made* this diamond?" he asked. "You could have bought this uncut stone, you know."

Jeb stood up from leaning against the desk. "If I made a stone like that one grow before your eyes, there would be no further doubt."

The man rubbed his mustache with a forefinger. He seemed to be trying to control some inner emotion. "The government must be certain, must take no chances," he said finally. "But if I could watch while you made one of these stones. . . ."

"Then come."

Jeb crossed the room, opened the door and led the way into the makeshift laboratory. His body was trembling again, his legs behaving badly. But he was much stronger now than he had been a month ago. . . .

There were three tables in the laboratory. One small table against the wall held a battered telephone. A second table—across the room from the first—held a small electric furnace, several pieces of wood, various tools and odds and ends of equipment. The third table was in the middle of the floor away from the others, and upon its scarred metal top was a strange machine.

The machine was composed of two oblong metal boxes that faced each other at a distance of about eighteen inches. Between the boxes were two large tubes that were equipped with what appeared to be conical reflectors that came to a focal point upon a slab of lead between them.

Jeb's mind was made up. If this man were a foreign agent, he would make some slip sooner or later. Once that slip was made, Jeb's line of action was clear. He would get to the telephone and call his friend, Chief of Police Red Williams. Or he could merely knock the telephone from the table, merely lift the instrument from the cradle and set it back again. Central would understand. *So would Red Williams!*

"NATURALLY," mentioned Jeb as he approached the machine, "I will not divulge the entire process to you." He opened a small lid upon each of the boxes, made a rapid mental calculation and closed them again. There were bits of charcoal in each of the boxes. "I will explain only enough of the process as we go along to prove to you that there is no trickery."

He could feel the man's hot breath coming over his shoulder as he knifed a small switch upon the metal table.

The tubes sprang into sudden life. The two reflectors—cones of finely meshed wire—turned dull red. Second by second, the glow increased until the cones turned a bright, glaring white.

Jeb stepped back a pace. The cones had become almost invisible in their whirling. Tiny, scintillating lancets—almost too small for the eye to see—were stabbing out of the cones toward the focal point upon the slab of lead.

"The tubes are sending pure atoms of carbon through the cones," he explained. "The electric field in the cones energizes the atoms, expands them and sends them out to the focal point where they come to rest. Once at rest, they become extremely cold due to their sudden loss of energy. The intense cold causes enormous contraction which, in turn, rapidly forces the atoms into crystalline form." *

*Mined diamonds are usually found in ancient volcanic vents, giving rise to the belief that they were formed in the volcano itself under great heat and pressure and then blown violently out into sudden, comparative coolness. Working under this theory, scientists have learned long ago how to produce extremely minute diamonds in their laboratories by heating pure prepared carbon and iron electrically, then letting the mass cool suddenly.—Ed.

The man was staring fixedly, his eyes bright, his face flushed. The machine held him as if through some hypnotic force; for there at the focal points upon the lead slab a tiny crystal was slowly taking shape!

Jeb waited until he judged the crystal to be approximately two carats in weight, then he flicked open the switches.

A moment later, he handed the cold stone to the man, avoiding the touch of fingers. "I believe you will find this one a perfect specimen," he said.

The man adjusted his eye piece quickly. *"Ja!"* he said, his tongue licking over thick lips. "It is perfect!"

Ja!

The foreign word slashed through Jeb's entire being, leaving him cold. A month ago, he should not have been afraid. He would have been complete master of the situation, Nazi agent or no Nazi agent. But now the weakness was upon him. . . .

The big man looked at him suddenly, color mounting in his face and his dark eyes glittering. Obviously, in his excitement, he had not realized he had spoken a word in his native tongue.

"My government will pay you your price," he stated. "For the process and the machine. Now! In cash!"

Jeb was certain now. He was certain the man was not an agent from the United States Government. A representative for the government would never have offered to pay in *cash!* There would have been a contract and, later, a check!

Then a new thought struck him. Ted Rendon! What had happened to Ted Rendon?

"You . . . you murdered him!" he blurted. "You *killed* Ted Rendon!"

INSTANTLY, he could have bitten out his tongue for making the statement that would put the man on guard. He should have waited, should have waited for a chance. . . .

The color had drained from the man's face, leaving it stony, flint-like. The eyes glared with the same hardness. "So!" he said. "So you know!"

"I . . . I guessed that something was wrong when you gave your name as T. R. Rendon." Jeb was having trouble with his jumping nerves. They were crying out for action, strong action that his weak body could not produce. "You see, I had lunch with the *real* T. R. Rendon four days ago."

"You guessed," sneered the man, "and still you did nothing."

"There seemed little I *could* do."

"Ja!" The man's face lighted egotistically. "Of course. A weakling like you. . . ."

Jeb made a dash for the telephone then. It took all the energy he could summon. His legs felt weak and watery. They wanted to stumble over each other.

But if he could just reach the telephone. . . .

Jeb both felt and heard the man's fist explode against the back of his head. The blow catapulted him forward, headlong and sprawling. Painful comets burst and scattered through his brain. He tried frantically to swerve to one side, to knock the telephone from its tiny table.

But his flailing arms missed their mark and he fell heavily against the wall.

The man was upon him in an instant, had him by the shirt front, dragging him to his feet. Helplessly, he tried to ward off the blow he saw coming. But he couldn't. The man's fist struck him hard in the face and sent him tumbling backward, backward and away from the telephone.

Jeb didn't get up. He knew that he

would only get knocked down again or . . . or shot.

The man was standing over him with a long-nosed, Luger-type pistol in his right hand, his dark eyes beady.

"You will stay where you are," he commanded. "You will keep away from the telephone."

Jeb sat up on the floor, his back to the wall. He felt blood trickling from his nose or lips. He couldn't tell which.

"You . . . you can't get away with this," he said.

"That is what you think." The man seemed certain of himself. "After I get the entire process from you, I shall take the machine away from here. A small boat will leave the east coast tonight and will contact a U-Boat from my own country. The undersea boat will go immediately to Germany. Your machine and its secret will be aboard."

Jeb knew that he was facing death. He knew that the man would kill him even if he did divulge the principle of the machine. The man was ruthless, would take no chances.

But Jeb had made up his mind to one thing. "You will never learn the entire secret of the process from me!" he stated slowly and with unmistakable finality.

HE felt the beady eyes drilling into him for a full minute before the man spoke. "Perhaps not. Sometimes you Americans can be even more stubborn than the British dogs. But it makes little difference. Once this machine is in the hands of our scientists, its secret will soon come to light."

Yes. That was true. The machine would speak for itself.

Jeb knew now that there was a spy ring somewhere in Washington. One of those spies had learned about the machine. Another had learned about the letter he had received two days ago—or, perhaps, had even written the letter.

And all the information had been handed over to this man that now stood over him, this man who had murdered Ted Rendon and taken his place.

Now the machine was destined for Germany. Once there, several things would happen. Germany would have plenty of cutting edges for tools. That was one thing. But there would be other things. Germany could turn out hundreds of thousands of the stones. German agents could bootleg these stones throughout South America, Africa, Canada, and the United States and other countries, and the money derived from them could be sent back to Germany to further the war effort!

Jeb became conscious that the man was speaking to him: "How many of these diamonds have you made?"

"A handful," Jeb answered.

He saw a light kindle in the man's eyes. The same expression came over the man's face that Jeb had seen there when he had showed the agent that first diamond in the inner office. Greed!

Jeb was certain of it. This man not only had greed for his fatherland, but personal greed as well.

"Where are they?"

Jeb's lips curved slightly. "In a vault. In a bank. Where you will be unable to touch them."

Death was close to Jeb at that moment. The man's body had stiffened, his eyes had narrowed and his finger had tightened upon the trigger of the gun. But he did not shoot. Something else must have flashed through his head at that moment. His eyes sought the diamond he was still holding in his left hand, and the glow in those eyes brightened. He licked his lips.

"Before I kill you, I've got to find out something." He began backing

away toward the table in the center of the floor. "I've got to find out if I can run this machine by myself. I may need your help."

"Sure," Jeb said to himself. "You want to make a handful of stones for your own personal property. A handful of extra large ones would make you a nice nest egg. After that, you'll begin thinking about your Fuehrer again!"

The man was behind the machine, facing Jeb. He put the gun down upon the table within easy reach and knifed the first switch.

Jeb measured the distance to the telephone. It was to far for a quick leap. The gun would stop him before he got half way. Anyway, his legs were so weak and wabbly that he doubted if they would support him.

THE tubes and cones glowed brightly. There was a slight buzz as the second switch closed. The cones began whirling rapidly, glowing brighter and brighter. Little pinpoints of light—like miniature tracer bullets from a machine gun—began flicking rapidly toward the focal points upon the slab of lead.

After the man had learned to his to own satisfaction that he could run the machine, after he had made a few diamonds . . .

Something clicked in Jeb Caldwell's plodding brain. It was something that set him on fire, filling his body with sudden warm strength and hope. The machine would never reach Germany! The thing was so simple. He should have thought of it before. He had to struggle hard to keep a smile from appearing upon his face.

Jeb leaned his head back against the wall and waited, regarding the man through half-closed lids.

A small crystal was building up upon the lead slab. The man's eyes were watching it avidly. His teeth were showing in a set grin of triumph.

Once, Jeb decided that the time had come. Then he thought of the gun upon the table. His brain made rapid calculations. He relaxed again, waiting.

The diamond had grown to the size of a pigeon's egg. Jeb could just see it from his position upon the floor. Again, he fought to keep the smile from playing upon his bruised lips.

The growing diamond was holding the man in fascination. In the glow of the spinning cones, the man's face looked like a symbol of satanic greed done in alabaster. Twice he licked his lips as the crystal continued to enlarge before him. . .

Jeb got slowly to his feet, steadying himself against the wall. He saw the man's eyes dart toward him, eyes that had suddenly lost their luster. The man's hand had closed over the gun, was bringing it up.

"Stay . . . stay where you are," he warned in an unsteady voice.

"I think," said Jeb, "that I'll just call up my friend, Chief of Police Red Williams."

Something resembling fear shot over the big man's face. He raised the gun higher. "If you take . . . another step, I'll . . . I'll shoot."

"Go right ahead," said Jeb. He was smiling openly now. The gun was centered upon him. But he didn't care. The weakness had left his legs. He was no longer afraid. "I'm taking the step."

The man tensed. The finger tightened upon the trigger. But no sudden, devastating explosion rocked the room. Instead, there came only a dull, metallic *click*.

The broad face went pale. It seemed to sag a bit. Fumbling fingers worked

with the mechanism of the gun, pumped a fresh shell into the magazine. The weapon came up once more. Again, there came the harmless *click*.

Jeb raised the telephone. "This is Jeb Caldwell," he told the operator. "Send Red Williams over here right away."

The big man was coming toward him, his face bewildered and sagging, his hands outstretched menacingly.

Jeb cradled the telephone. "I hate to do this," he said. "But, after all, you're asking for it!"

THERE was not much strength in Jeb's right arm, but his fist struck with sufficient force to topple the man backwards and send him thudding to the floor. He sat there, the gun still dangling from his hand, bewilderment making an ironic comedy of his face.

Jeb went to the other side of the room, found a small box upon the wall, opened it and unscrewed a fuse. The machine on the table went dead.

It seemed only a few minutes before the door flew open and Red Williams—beefy, red-faced and puffing—barged in. "So," he began, "you've gone and done it again . . ."

He stopped when he saw the man sitting upon the floor. "Who's this?"

"A Nazi spy."

Red's hand flashed quickly to his holster when he caught sight of the Luger. "A spy!"

"There's no danger," said Jeb. "His gun is useless. And the man himself is quite helpless. Both are slightly decarbonized."

"Slightly de-what?"

"The machine," Jeb explained. "It got him."

Red glanced toward the table in obvious distaste. "Oh, yeah! That thing! It's goin' to kill someone one of these days. Nearly got *you* a month ago." He shook his head. "If you hadn't been able to get to the telephone and knock it down when you did, you'da been a gonner."

"Yes." Jeb remembered. A month ago, due to a bad but illuminating experience with the machine, he had been rendered fully as helpless as the man upon the floor. He had been unable to turn it off, and had reached the telephone just in time.

"When you take this fellow to headquarters," Jeb suggested, "you might ask him about the spy ring in Washington. Ask him also about the small boats that contact German subs off the east coast."

"Usually, it's hard to get 'em to talk," said Red.

Jeb looked at the man upon the floor. It was a pitiful sight. The man's mouth hung open and his idiotic eyes were roving from one to the other of the men before him in abject terror.

"He'll talk. He's in such a weakened condition that he has no resistance left whatever. He'll tell you his whole family history if you ask him.

"And after you find out all you want to know," Jeb continued, "you can charge him with the murder of one T. R. Rendon, federal agent!"

"Whew!" Red whistled between his teeth. A moment later, he was ushering the man gingerly through the door.

Jeb turned to the machine and picked up the diamond. It was nearly as large as a hen egg. A strange grin played over his face as he nestled it in the palm of his hand. The diamond was of pure carbon. Part of that carbon had come from the gun powder in the Nazi's pistol! *The rest had come from the Nazi's own body!*

"I've got to remember to tell them in Washington to be sure and keep plenty of charcoal next to those tubes," he muttered. "When those tubes run

out of charcoal, they start picking up carbon from the next nearest source; and when that source happens to be the human body, it's hell!

"And . . . *and don't I know!*" he finished.

Finding a chair near the table, he sank down into it. A month at the beach should put him on his feet again. The proper food, rest, sunshine—that should put the carbon content of his body back to normal. . . .

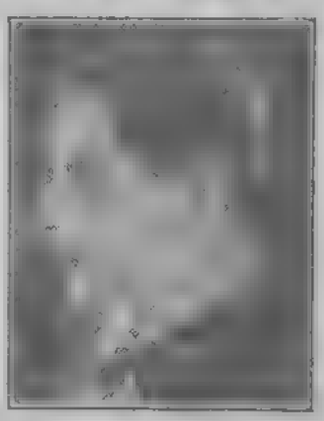
CHAMPAGNE LAUNCHINGS

By John J. Ellis

HAVE you ever wondered why a bottle of wine is smashed against the bow of a ship as it is launched? Well, one authority on the subject thinks it is a hangover from the days of the Vikings.

The Vikings were a very superstitious people and they believed that spirits inhabited all the trees of the forest. They were afraid that the spirits were offended when the Vikings cut down the trees to build their huge ships and would revenge themselves on the sailors of the ship unless they were appeased. It was their custom, therefore, to tie one or more of their prisoners, who had been captured on one of their many forays on the coast of Europe, to the ways when a new ship was launched. As the vessel would slide into the sea, it would crush the men and the Vikings believed their blood would satisfy the spirits of the trees. Today, the bottle of wine is broken against the bow of the ship so that Lady Luck will smile upon the ship and be persuaded to keep "evil" spirits away from her.

PROVES MAN IS GOD



A strange method of mind and body control, that leads to immense powers never before experienced, is announced by Edwin J. Dingle, F.R.G.S., well-known explorer and geographer. It is said to bring about almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind. Many report improvement in health. Others acquire superb bodily strength, secure better positions, turn failure into success. Often, with surprising speed, talents, ability and a more magnetic personality are developed.

This startling method was found in remote and mysterious Tibet, formerly a forbidden country, rarely visited by outsiders, and often called the land of miracles in the astounding books written about it. Here, behind the highest mountains in the world, Mr. Dingle learned the extraordinary system he is now disclosing to the Western world.

He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind-power, capable of surprising feats, from the delay of old age to the prolonging of youth, and the achievement of dazzling business and professional success. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized by a false idea of what we really are.

Most of us know that God is everywhere, but never realize that God cannot be everywhere without being also in us. And if He is in us, then all His wisdom, all His power — unlimited knowledge and infinite power — is likewise in us. If God is everywhere, then there is nothing but God, and we also are that — a completely successful human life being the expression of God in man. The Holy Spirit of the Bible is an actual living force in man, and through it we too can do "greater things than these." The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing our minds of the hypnotizing ideas which blind us to the vast power of this living force within us.

A nine-thousand word treatise, revealing the startling results of this system, is now being offered free to anyone who quickly sends his name and address. Write promptly to the address below, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

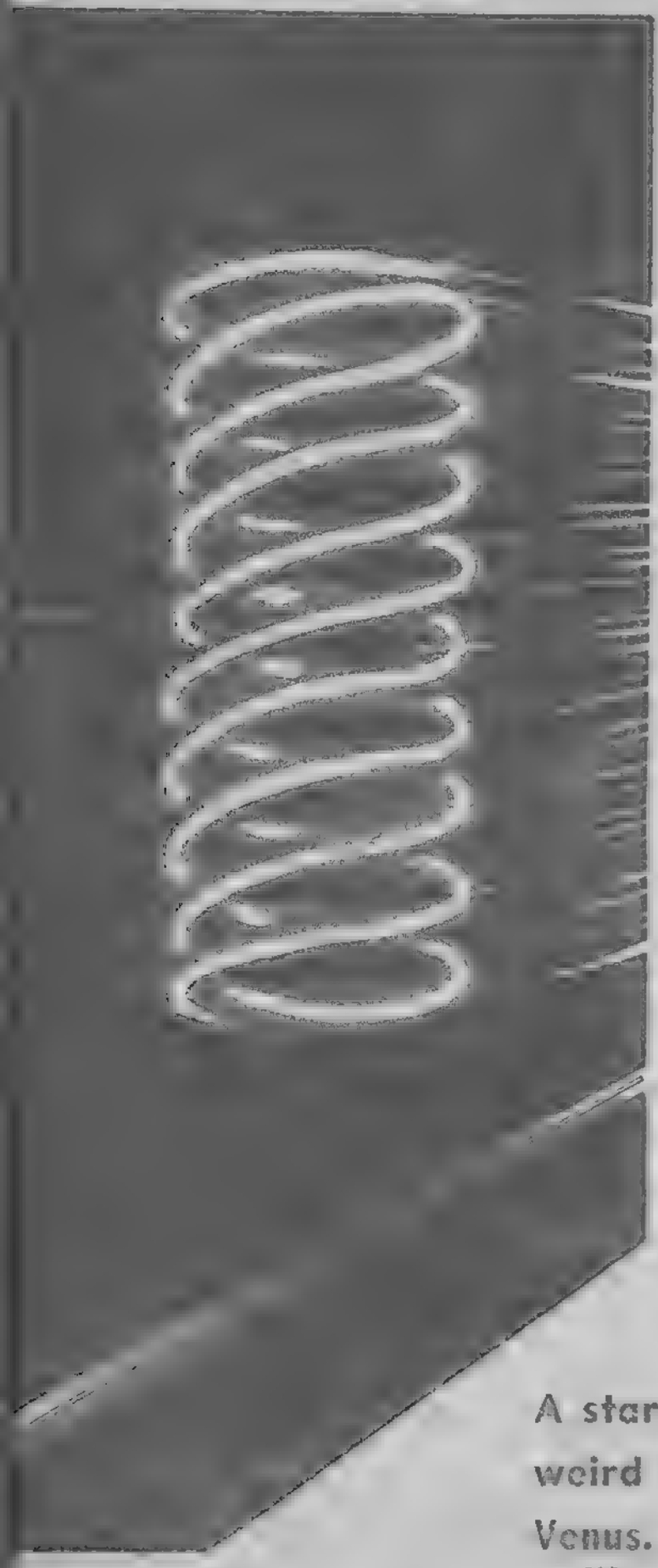
The Institute of Mentalphysics, Dept. A-67, 213 So. Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif.

THE SILVER

Madge shrank back in alarm as the glowing thing swept down the corridor

COIL

by THORNTON AYRE



THE feting and speechifying were over—and Bill Dawlish looked heartily thankful for it.

"Damned good job I don't go to Venus and back every day!" he grinned, seated at the head of our reunion dinner table. "Spencer got to the Moon and back in 1970; I've made this trip ten years later. And in another ten years . . . ?" He shrugged off the speculation and went on with his meal.

There were four of us present—Bill Dawlish himself; his taciturn, strong-necked co-explorer Ralph Trent; myself—Bob Hansen, as the inventor of the machine that had done the trick; and Madge, my wife. Here we were in a little quartet, safe from the public gaze, in my quiet New Jersey home.

"If the truth were told," Ralph Trent commented presently, "Bill here is holding out on us. He found something on the Dark Terminator of Venus that's enormously valuable. So he says! But he won't tell us what it is."

Bill grinned. "Not yet. Somebody might want to frisk it, and I want to see what happens first. Nobody's to know a thing."

"It" was a steel-bound box, heavily combination locked, which had gone

A startling thing came out of the weird box Bill Dawlish found on Venus. What was its grim purpose?

up with the rest of Bill's luggage to his room. I remembered how I wondered at the time what the thing was . . .

"To be frank, I don't like it," Ralph persisted, his dark eyes smoldering rather resentfully. "I shared the dangers with you; Bob here sank his money in the venture—What right have you to keep back anything?"

I waited, rather surprised. Deep down I'd never really liked Ralph Trent. Courageous, yes—but aggressive, even sinister. That he was piqued by not knowing what was in the steel box from the Twilight Belt* was plain.

"I have the right of discovery," Bill said quietly. "Before I show it to the world I want to be sure of something. Believe me, it's for everybody's good."

Ralph hesitated, then went on sullenly with his meal. Altogether, it seemed that Bill's secret had cast a blight over the proceedings for the rest of the evening passed in merely matter-of-fact anecdotes instead of ribald celebration. And so, finally, tired with the events of the day, we went to bed early.

"Just what," Madge asked me, yawning, "do you think he *has* found?"

"Lord knows! Mineral probably. If it comes to that, anything from Venus is enormously valuable because of its very rarity. I guess he's making too much out of nothing . . ."

There the subject dropped and we composed ourselves for slumber—but about an hour later we were both jerked upright and awake by the most unearthly scream ringing through the quietness of the house. It had come from somewhere along the corridor where Bill and Ralph had their rooms.

In an instant I was in my robe and slippers, and racing to the door. On the corridor gushed a flood of light; Bill's door was wide open. I hurried to it, then stopped dead just inside the threshold. It was an appalling sight which met my eyes.

There was Ralph Trent, fully dressed and pale as death, with a massive poker in his hand. On the floor in front of him, sprawled out with a ghastly wound across his forehead, lay poor Bill! That he was dead was instantly evident.

With an effort I mastered myself, turned just in time to push Madge back into the corridor.

"What—? Why?" she asked, startled.

"Something pretty bad," I told her tensely. "Murder, maybe. Go back to the room—for the moment anyway. . . ." Then I hurried back into Bill's room, slammed and locked the door, grabbed Ralph's arm and whirled him round.

"In God's name, Ralph, what have you done?"

"Eh? What?" He looked at me as though he were half stunned. Then he eyed the poker stupidly. "I—I didn't do anything," he whispered.

"Then what do you call *this?*" I snatched the poker from him, but as I gazed at it I noticed something. It was unmarked; not the least sign to show he'd committed violent assault with it.

"I—I came in here to smash open that steel box," he said, getting a grip on himself. "I know Bill took sleeping tablets tonight to steady his nerves after today's activities: I figured he wouldn't wake. That was why I brought the poker, to prise the lock. But—but the room was dark when I got in. I switched on the light—there was a horrible scream—and I saw Bill lying there . . . just like that. It's true! You've got to believe it!"

---

* The Twilight Belt of Venus, immune to the 720-hour day and night.—Ed.

I never saw a man so desperately anxious to be credited. For a moment I stared at him grimly, then I dropped beside the poor mangled wreck that had been Bill. From this lower vantage point my gaze shifted under the bed—

A start shook me. That solid steel-bound box was *blown apart!* No other words can describe it. It looked as an old tin will look when hopelessly mangled. And something more—the lid had been ripped clean off its hinges and flung several feet away.

"Okay," I breathed, getting up and clutching Ralph's arm; "I believe you. You couldn't have smashed the box like this anyway— But what in God's name was in it? Certainly not explosive, else there'd have been a fire."

I tugged the box out. Inside was a curious smell, rather like ozone. And now, for the first time, we both noticed it had tiny air holes drilled along the top!

"Whatever was in this was—alive!" I cried incredulously.

Ralph caught the box in his strong hands. I saw his face go grim and set.

"I never noticed the ventilation before, either. I figured that Bill had gotten some special carbon deposits or something, and I felt I was right in demanding a share. You, too. But something alive! I never even suspected. . . . The strength the thing must have had!" He paused, staring down at the dead body of Bill Dawlish.

"We'd better send for the police?" he said finally.

"Not until we know what really killed him," I snapped. "It must be around some place. We'll put him on the bed and then take a look—"

The rest of my sentence froze off as from somewhere in the corridor we both heard Madge give a desperate scream. Like a shot I was through the doorway and pelting to our bedroom. I found her holding her throat in horror, struggling to keep herself from fainting. When she saw me, and Ralph right behind me, she sank weakly into a chair.

"What—what was it?" she questioned hoarsely.

"What did you see?" I demanded, shaking her forcibly. "Madge! What scared you so?"

"Something—something like a silver coil," she panted. "It moved at an incredible speed—suddenly shot toward me from somewhere in the corridor as I stood waiting for you to appear. I saw it gleaming. I screamed, jumped in here, and it went downstairs I think . . ." Fighting for composure she got to her feet again. "Bob, what *was* it?" she insisted.

I glanced at Ralph sharply. "You know? You've seen Venus and we haven't—"

"If it's what I think it is we've got to find it damned quick," he broke in anxiously. "I told you the light was off when I got into Bill's room; I remember hearing a sound in the open doorway behind me as I switched the light on. It was this light in here that saved you, Madge," he finished, looking at her. Then he hurried on, "No time for explanations now. We must track it down, and the first place to look is the icebox, I think . . ."

He swung away, and I followed him after stopping only long enough to grab a revolver from the dressing table drawer. I motioned to Madge to stay behind, but she isn't that sort of a girl. She tailed along beside me as I followed Ralph down the staircase.

We went cautiously, all lights full on —but no sounds came to us from the lower quarters of the house. Not at

first, that is—then as we neared the kitchen regions there was a distinct, odd buzzing sound. It was pretty close to unearthly, sounded like a strong-winged bird imprisoned in a tinder box. It made a noise that was crossed be*tween a rattle and a whir.*

"Easy!" Ralph cautioned, and edged his hand through the slightly open kitchen door, flicked on the light.

At that things happened—incredible things! From inside the kitchen came a whizzing, whirring din, the sound of smashing crockery and glass—then something struck the inner side of the door with staggering force and came clean through the woodwork! We fell flat automatically and over our heads sailed a long, twisted torpedo of iridescent silver.

In a sense it was beautiful, coiled like a corkscrew, and it moved with a bewildering rapidity which dazzled the vision. For a time it kept up its eye-numbing whirring flying—then it made a beeline for the darkness of the shadows near the door of my laboratory.

Then—*Wham!* And it had gone through the door into the dark laboratory interior.

I got up, my mouth dry, helped Madge to her feet.

"For God's sake, Ralph, what is it?" I nearly shrieked.

"Blind force," he answered enigmatically; then led the way into the kitchen. And we saw as we went the other hole the thing had made in the door upon its entry.

Madge nearly burst into tears at the chaos in her domain. Plates and glasses were smashed to hell. The solid steel of the ice-box was warped and bent and the food inside it, though untouched, was mixed in an unholy jumble.

"The silver coil, as you named it, Madge, is a denizen of Venus' Twilight Belt," Ralph stated grimly, turning. "It lives in eternally dark caves and extreme cold. Ordinarily, it seems torpid. On Venus, Bill and I explored the Twilight Mountains and found thousands of these motionless silvery coils lying frozen stiff in the dark. We figured they were dead or asleep, even as the tortoise hibernates for the winter. I warned Bill against having anything to do with them—but it's clear what must have happened. Without my knowing it he took one as specimen, thinking to make a fortune from the Earthly zoologists— God, if only he'd listened to me and kept away!"

Because I knew Ralph was a better scientist than Bill had ever been I believed him.

"Yes, blind force," he repeated. "On Venus I found obvious signs that the lower classes of Venusian life, instead of being protoplasmic are of force, crystallized.* Why? Because the energy of the Sun, so much closer to Venus than to Earth, is infused into all the life structures of Venus. The creatures of the Twilight Belt however are the lowest class, akin to our protoplasm. Of course, though the Twilight Belt is out of range of actual sunlight, the Sun's energy permeates every inch of the planet. . . . It's obvious that the warmth of the bedroom stirred this thing into life. It burst its bonds, attacked and killed Ralph and, I believe,

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* The whole universe can be defined as either energy (force) or matter. Matter can be changed to energy (an example: the burning of coal in a steam engine, which produces steam power, and in which much energy is wasted in the form of flame, smoke, friction, etc.), or conversely, energy can be changed to matter (theoretically, although we do not have any practical evidence of this except perhaps in the formation of the odd "fungus" we find on battery terminals, etc.). Neither is ever lost. Thus, here, we have a proposition we cannot basically deny; the possibility of a form of matter made up of energy which has been thus transformed from force. The indication here is that the "force" is merely crystallized, and would eventually revert back to its original state.—Ed.

was going to use him for food—though its normal food as I see it would be in our range of poisons. Then, as I guessed, sudden light chased it off and it looked for the coldest, darkest spot —the icebox. But definitely it is carnivorous and will try and attack us for food's sake—it's the only aim in life. We'll be unpalatable for it, but better than nothing."

"But surely we can kill it?" I demanded. "Shoot it?"

He smiled bitterly. "Might as well try and shoot solid steel! It's *force*, man! Darkness will quieten it but won't kill it. Light will frighten it, but also won't kill it. Yet we've got to nail it somehow . . ."

He thought, then braced himself. "We've a fight on our hands, Bob," he announced, his jaw set. "Let's see what we can do. You'd better stay here, Madge."

She nodded, but I doubted if she'd obey . . .

RALPH and I started off from the kitchen and cautiously entered the laboratory. We advanced quietly, then, as hell had it, I stumbled. That loose board by the doorway had a habit of tripping me up. I straightened, sweating and listening. All was silent. Through the hole in the door streamed the light of the hall in a narrow cone.

"If we stay in the dark we can't see to get at it!" I objected.

Ralph mumbled an assent and put the light on. Nothing happened, but some chemical jars had been overturned. Salts of lemon were strewn on the floor and some had clearly been consumed. Ralph gave me a significant glance.

"That's the kind of thing it likes! Poison! Now, where is it?"

Gathering a little courage we advanced, only to swing round in alarm as Madge came in.

"Shut the door, quick!" Ralph blazed at her; and she did, fumbling with the key. We hadn't told her to lock it, but evidently she thought the precaution necessary. Then she gave a horrified gasp, lunged forward— There was a remote clink.

"What?" I barked at her, tense with anxiety.

"The—the key!" she replied huskily. "I've dropped it— It went down this crack by the loose board . . ."

"Good God, Madge, do you realize we're trapped in here?" I yelped. "This laboratory door has an inner lining of steel: we can't smash it down even if the Silver Coil can . . . And the windows are too small to get through—"

"Shut up!" Ralph interrupted sharply; then as we froze into silence his big hand closed round a girder-spanner on the bench. He advanced with infinite caution to a shadowy part of the laboratory in the corner. There, I remembered, I kept a a lot of other loose chemicals some of which were no doubt edible for this blind, merciless thing from Venus. I stood waiting, Madge clutched to me, both of us in thrall at Ralph's iron nerves.

The door of the corner chemical cupboard, steel faced, was slightly ajar. In any case I never bothered to lock it— In a lightning movement Ralph suddenly flung himself at it, slammed it shut and swung the heavy bolt in place. Then he relaxed and mopped his dewed face.

"Got it for the moment," he grinned breathlessly. "Now we've got to figure out something to put an end to it. It is afraid of light—that we know. I suppose there *is* a chance that a light intense enough might kill it. Got anything?"

"I've a two-thousand watt film pro-

jector," I said quickly. "Carbon arc light. That might do it."

"Good!"

He followed me as I hurried over to it. We swung it round on its tripod and directed the lens toward the steel door —but at that identical moment things happened again. The steel of the door began to warp and flake! Speechless with amazement we could only gaze at it, watching the outwardly bulging dents; then like an aerial torpedo that corkscrew of living horror slammed out to freedom, pieces of steel hurtling with shrapnel force in all directions.

"Get down!" Ralph screamed—and we all dropped flat, watching in desperate fear. And this time we saw the Venusian horror more clearly as it whirled round with dizzying speed seeking shelter from the electric light.

It had a face of sorts—a blind expressionless face with no eyes and seemed to be all tightly clamped mouth. It was for all the world like a perpetually coiled snake, only in the style of an earthly electric eel it gave off a silvery glow. More than that indeed, for it sparkled and crackled like a living bolt of lightning when it struck metal! Despite my horror, I found time to admire the diversity of Nature who had conceived such a mass of supernaturally powerful destruction, obviously with the intent of making it able to master its normal rigorous environment.

Finally it hurtled into a corner behind a workbench and was still again.

Gently Ralph got up, edged his way round to the film projector and fumbled with it. Madge and I could see his face was set in hard resolution. Finally he flicked the button on the machine. The motor started up and with it the blinding glare of carbon arc light casting a flour-white beam on the opposite wall.

"Here," Ralph said, and slid across to me the wrench he had been holding. "If it dives this way lam out at it. Our only chance, I guess. I'm going to drive it out."

He wheeled the projector forward on its rubber wheels, swung the beam so it flooded the corner. There was an instant response as that heinous thing was stung into action. It sailed through the air towards me.

I ducked, straightened again, then whizzed the wrench with all the power of my arms. It was like trying to hit a flash of lightning! I missed hopelessly and went flying. Madge wriggled under the heavy bench for safety. I recovered my balance and raced to Ralph's side as he swung the projector round, using it as a searchlight.

Tormented by the brilliance the Venusian horror hurled itself at the walls, the fittings, the glass bottles— Then it dived towards Madge! She gave a frantic scream—but thank God it missed her.

Ralph's jaws tightened at the narrow shave, and with admirable courage he moved forward, slowly pinning the thrashing monstrosity into a corner of blinding brilliance.

"It's obviously hungry," he tossed out. "And but for this damned light it would make a meal off us right now, even if we are not right in its line of menu. Keep the light on long enough and it may die, like a fish out of water—"

He broke off with a gasp as the carbon light fizzed and flickered abruptly. The snowy effulgence changed to yellow, then deep purple. Savagely he adjusted the carbon points, struggling to rebuild the right resistance between them—but in those seconds of momentary diminution the thing was done.

Freed from its light prison the monster leapt. It hit me a glancing blow but it was like a wallop from a five-ton

truck. I went staggering backwards helplessly and struck the wall with a force that nearly knocked me silly.

I straightened again, only to feel paralysing horror pump through me. For Ralph was struggling with the thing—and it was the most ungodly sight I'd ever seen! His coat and vest were practically torn off, to reveal gaping wounds where the monster had cleaved with the force of a welder into his flesh. It was only his iron strength that kept him going—and even that was failing.

Madge—small wonder—had fainted clean away. Sick with fright, I snatched up the wrench and dealt the thing a terrific blow. All I got for that was a backlash, half electrical, through my fingers that made me shout with anguish. It had been like hitting a steel wall with a steel rod.

And Ralph? He had relaxed now, moving weakly, horribly mangled. The ghost of a grin was on his dark, powerful face, then it froze into the granite-like grin of death. There was blood on the floor. Hardly conscious of what I was doing I groped my way to the projector and, being used to its tricks, had the carbons at full blaze instantly. Immediately the serpent flew to a shadowy corner for safety.

I looked at the mangled ruin that had been Ralph, took down a smock from the door and threw it over him. Then, breathing hard, I tried to get some sort of control over myself. This thing had *got* to be slain! But what methods? Light only scared it—immobilized it, but didn't kill it. How about an electric shock? If I could remove the electrodes from one of my disrupter globes and attack it with them—

Not much use, probably. I didn't even know if it were electricity as we understand it, or whether it was the embodiment of basic force which we definitely do *not* understand. Besides, attacking electricity with electricity might blow me to Hades!

Then as I stood thinking furiously a weak cry swung me round. I had almost forgotten about Madge. Gently I helped her to her feet and she clung to me tightly.

"Is it—?" she whispered hopefully.

"No," I told her grimly. "It's behind that bench at the moment, sheltering from these arcs— Good God, if only we could get out of here! We must!" I finished desperately. "Come on—we'll rip up the floorboards and try and find that key. Should have done it at first . . ."

With my wrench we pried up the boards and I fumbled below. I could feel nothing. I got a torch and flashed it in the gap. I saw the key finally, a goodish distance away.

"Hang on," I told Madge tensely. "I'll go below and get it."

"All right—but hurry up!" And her eyes went nervously towards that deadly corner still pinned by the projector beam.

Down I scrambled, edged along on my stomach with the floor beams pressing down on my shoulders—then just when I was within an ace of grabbing that infernal key there came a violent commotion from above. There was the sound of smashing glassware and a scream from Madge, followed by her running feet some place over my head.

Her voice screamed huskily. "Bob quick! *Quick!*"

I couldn't even answer her. The dust from the flooring had choked and blinded me. I jerked my head up and caught it a resounding crack on one of the beams. The torch dropped from my hand and went rolling out on the concrete foundation. Desperately, I made a final grope in the dark for that key,

and couldn't find it— Then I wormed my way round and back to the hole in the lab. floor as quickly as I could.

Madge was out of sight, the bench was overturned, bottles were strewn in all directions. Some of them had had corrosive acid in them and now it was swilled smokingly on the floor. The Venusian horror was hurling itself with gigantic force at the only remaining steel cabinet where I kept my filing records. Since Madge was not in sight she'd obviously screwed herself in there for safety. As for the Thing's escape—those damned carbon arcs had faded again!

I dived for the projector, forced them into action and hurled blinding light at the thing—but only for a second or so for the acid swirling on the floor suddenly nipped the flex cable right through and the light died out of the lamphouse! Sweat broke out all over me as I realized I was defenseless.

Almost involuntarily I picked up the entire projector and hurled it at the Coil. Evidently it was hurt for it flew away from the cabinet door. Instantly I jumped forward, yanked the door open and got Madge out—then we dashed for safety behind the overturned bench. Temporary safety, anyway . . .

I began to think desperately. Since that projector's mass weight had hurt it, it might be possible to damage it with violent blows after all! My eye roamed from its present quiescence—no doubt while it recovered—to the heavy vice I often used. It was electrically operated too. If I could only get the Coil in *that!*

No sooner had I thought of the idea than I thought of something else. It had shown its liking for salts of lemon, and there was still some left on the floor. I wriggled towards the stuff, got a handful of it and sprinkled it on the plate in front of the vice, afterwards springing the vice-jaws wide open. Then I crawled to the switchboard whence it was operated.

"This may do it," I breathed to the horrified Madge. "Worth a try, anyway!"

She watched, wide-eyed. Picking up a bottle, I hurled it at the thing, stung it into life again. It flew round in circles, missing us—then as I had hoped its blind avidity drove it towards the salts instead of Madge and me. It settled—and, thank God, as we tensely watched it, it unwittingly lowered the back half of its corkscrew form into the open jaws!

It was a glorious moment! I was nearly chuckling with relief as I closed the switch on the board. In a flash those jaws closed with inexorable power, pinned the Coil mercilessly. It made no sound but its wild, frantic lashings instantly showed how much it was incommoded.

"Now!" I panted, straightening. "Here comes the showdown!"

For the last time, as I hoped, I picked my wrench up and moved towards it, no longer nervous. Instead a cool sort of bravado was upon me, and like a fool I paused a moment to study it now it was powerless to hurt me. . . . The more I looked at its blind, ferocious little face the more I shuddered to think so beautiful a world as the Evening Star could produce such a thing of evil—

"Kill it, Bob!" Madge implored me weakly. "Don't stand there!"

Her voice jerked me into life. I raised the wrench and swung it in preparation for the blow—but those seconds of idle curiosity had lost me the initiative, for with a sudden violent effort the thing literally *tore itself in pieces*—four distinct chunks that were as brittle as though soaked in liquid air.

But they didn't snap as they fell. In-

stead they coiled up and writhed with life. Nothing was left but that one immovable piece clamped in the vise. Then as I stared in bewilderment the four pieces started swelling—growing—!

"Fission!" I yelped, understanding. "It's—reproduced! Like a protoplasm divides into a new individual; this thing does it by breaking itself. Either because of the danger or else because it was ripe for it anyway after the food—Lord!"

I dropped my wrench with a crash as the four little devils swelled and grew with incredible metabolism. Hurriedly I gained Madge's side.

"Bob, what on earth do we do?" she nearly screamed at me. "Now we've four of them to tackle—! We can't do it! We're finished!"

"Easy," I panted; and my eyes flashed to the hole in the floorboards where I'd searched for the key. "Down there!" I said abruptly. "Only way—Come on!"

We scrambled forward and I bundled Madge down the hole first. Already those four children of the Coil were nearing adult size and would then start their endless blind search for food—human or chemical. I blundered into the hole after Madge, dragged down the boards as best I could. For a while we lay in the dark, shivering in fear, listening to the rising commotion above.

Then Madge began dragging herself away slowly, presently gave a little cry.

"What?" I panted, reaching her.

"Acid, on my hand," she said. "Must have seeped through the boards."

"Put your handkerchief round it; all we can do now. Damnation!" I exploded. "Where's that torch I dropped?"

I floundered past her, searching for it. Over our heads there was now a veritable hurricane of energy going on. Bottles were flying, instruments being overturned—then, as I still searched for the torch, I stopped and sniffed. Smoke was distinctly noticeable!

"It can't be—fire?" Madge whispered hoarsely; then she broke off with a horrified scream. "It *is* fire! Look!"

I was looking. Further away from us on our floor-ceiling was a smoky red glow. Either the fuming acid or else the fused electric cable had started it—What in hell did that matter? It *had* started and we were stuck down here!

"What do we do?" Madge cried, clutching me. "Bob, Bob, think of something! Those things above—and us down here— We'll be burned to death!"

I never thought so furiously before. Then in the midst of it, putting my hand down, I landed right on the torch. Instantly I yanked it up, flashed it on. I don't know if it was Providence that directed the beam to a wire running under the floorboards, but it certainly happened.

"What? *What?*" Madge implored, seeing I was frowning.

"That's the fire alarm emergency wire," I told her quickly. "As you know I have the lab wired in case of sudden combustion without my knowledge. It should go off and warn the fire station as the temperature rises—But we're not waiting that long!" I snapped; and seizing the wire I pulled it with all my strength. Though we heard nothing I knew the alarm had gone at the fire station.

"That ought to fetch 'em," I panted. "And we've got to chance those flying horrors just in case. A minute—the key . . .

I found it, then held it in my teeth as we turned and inched back to the hole in the floor. It wasn't so easy. Smoke was around us in choking clouds; I had to half drag Madge as she coughed and spluttered . . . But at last I gained the roughly covered hole

and thrust my head against the boards.

Just as quickly I ducked back. The four flying coils, as large now as their parent had been, dived for my unprotected head. They struck the boards with rending impact—so I used my torch to keep them off.

Smoke was now suffocating me, filling my lungs. I dragged Madge up, half fainting, beside me, and she revived in the clearer air. The torch still kept them off somewhat. The ordinary lights had gone out, but the glare of the fire was sufficient to show me my way.

The door seemed infinitely far off—but I'd got to chance it. I left Madge directing the torch, blundered to the door and turned the key in the lock. At the same time the scream of the fire-engine's siren came from somewhere outside. I remember opening the steel door—then I guess I must have fainted.

I came to myself to find I was lying beside Madge in an ambulance. A fireman was smiling at us grimly.

"Nice blaze you had there, sir," he commented briefly. "But we got it under— Okay, take it easy. You're all right, and your wife too. Only shock. Say," he added, "we managed to save one of these from your lab. Figured it might be important."

From his oilskins he pulled a twisted coil.

"Take it away!" I screamed involuntarily; then as he eyed me queerly and I saw it didn't move I added slowly, "Let me look . . ."

Madge, recovering, stared at it too. It *was* one of the four Venusian coils without doubt, but it was as useless as petrified stone and still damp. Damp! I began to laugh hysterically.

"Of course!" I yelled. "The water from the hoses! Why in God's name did we never think of it? Electricity —water—short circuit— Death! A glass of water could have saved us!"

Madge stared at me for a moment, then she joined me in my laughing. The fireman stared at us dubiously, probably wondering if he'd saved a couple of lunatics. Well, maybe he had at that!

The End

TAMING PLANTS

HAVE you ever heard of a person actually taming a plant? Well, believe-it-or-not, it has been done and reported by several scientists, amateur explorers and travelers.

This group of plants, called the sensitive plants, consists of many species of the leguminous group such as peas, beans, acacias, mimosos, and others. Some of these plants are familiar to you as our own North American plants, but the strangest and most remarkable members of the group are found only in the tropics.

The leaves of our northern species usually have to be touched to cause any reaction, but the tropical species are so sensitive that their leaves will shrivel and close even if a person or large animal comes near the plant. Some of the species consist of trailing vines and if only one leaf on the entire vine is touched or "senses" danger, it will close and "warn" all the other leaves who also close. And what is so amazing is that from the time the first leaf flashes the danger signal till the last leaf closes is a matter of a second. When the danger is past, the leaves reopen one at a time and the one that gave the "danger" signal is invariably the one to give the "all-clear" signal.

Many people who have observed this reaction in the sensitive plants believe that this entire procedure is simply a reflex action in the plants similar to the kick response of a human being when he is struck below the knee on one leg crossed over his other leg. But scientists who have observed the plants for many months attribute this action to the intelligence of the plants. They have proved this by experimentation.

If a plant is touched or approached by the same person for a few days without any harm being done to the plant after the touch, the plant will become used to the person and will not close when this particular person touches it. However, if a stranger touches the plant, all the leaves will close immediately showing that the plant is only "trained" insofar as the recognized person is concerned and not for the stranger.

—*Carter T. Wainwright.*

HARD GUY

By H. B. CARLETON

Picking up hitch-hikers even in 2000 AD is risky business

HE WAS standing at the side of the glassite super-highway, his arm half-raised, thumb pointed in the same direction as that of the approaching rocket car. Ordinarily Frederick Marden would have passed a hitch-hiker without stopping, but there was something in the bearing and appearance of this one that caused him to apply his brakes.

Marden opened the door next to the vacant seat beside him.

"Going my way?" he asked.

A pair of steady, unsmiling blue eyes looked him over. "Yeah."

"All right, then. Hop in."

The hitch-hiker took his time. He slid into the seat with casual deliberateness and slammed the car door shut. The rocket car got under way once more.

They rode in silence for half a mile or so. Finally Marden glanced questioningly at his companion's expressionless profile.

"Where are you headed for?" he asked.

"Dentonville." He spoke from the corner of his mouth, without turning his head.

"Oh, yes. That's the next town, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

Not very communicative, reflected Marden, noticing the rather ragged condition of the other's celo-lex clothing.

"Have much trouble getting rides?"

The passenger turned his head, now, his blue eyes without emotion.

"Yeah. Most guys are leery about pickin' up hitch-hikers. Scared they'll get robbed."

Marden pursed his lips, nodded.

"Something to that, all right. I'm usually pretty careful myself; but I figured you looked okay."

"Can't always tell by looks," was the calm reply. "'Course us guys mostly pick out some guy with a swell atomic-mobile if we're goin' to pull a stick-up. When we see a old heap like this one there's usually not enough dough to make it pay."

Marden felt his jaw drop.

"Say, you sound like you go in for that sort of thing! I'm telling you right now, I haven't enough cash on me to make it worth your while. I'm just a salesman, trying to get along."

"You got nothin' to worry about," his passenger assured him. "Stick-ups ain't my racket."

An audible sigh of relief escaped Marden.

"I'm certainly glad to hear that! What is your—er—racket, anyway?"

The blue eyes frosted over.

"Look, chum, sometimes it ain't exactly healthy to ask questions like that."

"Pardon me," Marden said hastily. "I didn't mean anything. It's none of my business, of course."

THE calm eyes flicked over his contrite expression.

"Skip it, pal. You look like a right guy. I'll put you next to somethin'. Only keep your lip buttoned, see?"

"Oh, absolutely."

"I'm Mike Eagen—head of the Strato Rovers."

"No!" Marden was plainly awed. "The Strato Rovers, eh? I've heard of them, all right."

The other nodded complacently.

"Yeah. We're about the toughest mob this side of Mars. We don't bother honest people, though. We get ours from the crooks and racketeers. They can't squeal to the Interplanetary Police."

"There's a lot in what you say," agreed Marden. "And of course that puts your . . . mob in the Robin Hood class."

"Robin Hood—nuts! That guy was a dope! Runnin' around with bows and arrows. Why, we got a mystery ray that paralyzes anybody that starts up with us. They're all right when it wears off, but by that time we get away."

Marden was properly impressed.

"A mystery ray! With a weapon like that, you should be able to walk into a bank and clean it out without any trouble."

His passenger's lips curled.

"I told you, we don't bother honest people. We even help the S.P. sometimes. Right now we're workin' with the Earth-Mars G-men in roundin' up a gang of fifth-columnists that are plannin' on takin' over the gov'ment. They're led by the Black Hornet. This Black Hornet goes around pretendin' like he's a big business man, but he's really a internatural spy."

"A—what?"

"A internatural spy," repeated Marden's companion, shortly. "The E-M G-men say he's the most dangerous man in the country. But he won't last long with the Strato Rovers on his trail."

Marden nodded.

"I can believe that. Tell me, Eagen, what are you doing out here around a small Earth town like Dentonville?"

"The gov'ment's buildin' some kind of a ammunition place near here, and I understand the Black Hornet's figurin' on wreckin' everything. 'Course he

won't get away with it."

Scattered plasticade houses on either side of the road indicated they had reached the outskirts of Dentonville. Mike Eagen pointed ahead to a small white house set back among a cluster of trees.

"There's where I'm holed up. Drop me off in front."

A young woman in a faded blue satin-glass house-dress was standing at the gate of the white picket fence. She watched in silence as the passenger stepped from the rocket car and lifted his hand to the driver in careless farewell.

"Thanks for the lift, chum," said Mike Eagen.

"Not at all," replied Marden. "Glad to have been of service to Mike Eagen."

The woman smiled to him.

"He's told you his name, I see."

Marden lifted his hat.

"Indeed he has."

"Michael is all right," she said. "I do think, though, that he reads too many Buck Gordon Interplanetary comic books for a boy of eleven."

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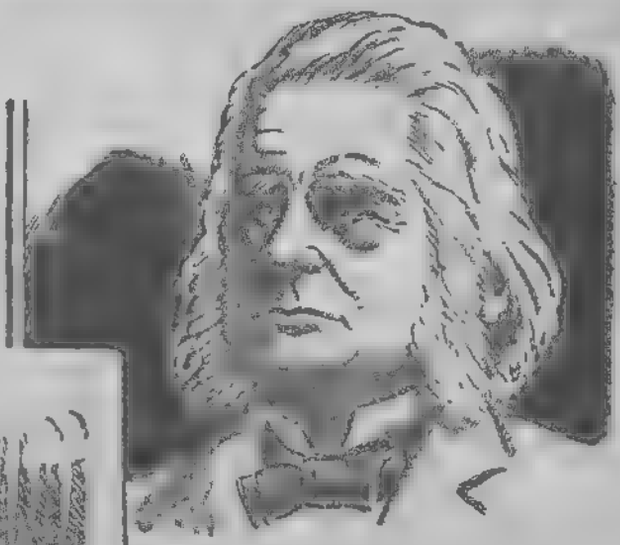
Scientific

MANY OF THE **CAVE PICTOGRAPHS** EXECUTED BY CRO-MAGNON ARTISTS SHOW TOUCHES OF GENIUS. **RED OCHRE** WAS THEIR PREDOMINATING COLOR.



Dr. **THOMAS H. HUXLEY** SUGGESTS THAT THE CRO-MAGNON MEN WHO ANNIHILATED THE NEANDERTHALS WERE AN **INVADING HORDE** FROM AMERICA.

BOTH THE **AMERICAN INDIAN** AND THE **CRO-MAGNON** ARE OF THE LONG-HEADED RACE WITH UNUSUALLY SHORT FACES and HIGH CHEEK BONES.

THE **SUN-WORSHIPING AMERICAN INDIAN** CONSIDER **RED SACRED.** IN SOME BURIAL CEREMONIES THEY **PAINT** THEIR DEAD WITH RED OCHRE SO THEY WILL BE RECOGNIZED AS **RED MEN** BY THE **SUN GOD.**

DID THE AMERICAN INDIAN ONCE INVADE EUROPE?

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

Illustrated by Joe Sewell

Perhaps all of the invasions of the past have not been like those intended today—maybe Americans have invaded Europe!

THE subject of race is undoubtedly the most explosive with which a scientist must deal. It is the subject most calculated to arouse his emotions instead of his reason and set his usually straight thinking off at a tangent. It is only natural that every man should prefer his own type, and this fact will creep in to shade his opinion unless he is constantly upon the alert.

For example, when we read an article purporting to prove that the civilizations of ancient America were founded by round-headed white men with long noses, who commanded vast numbers of short-nosed slaves, we must immediately suspect that the author is a round-headed white man with a long nose; or when we read a history which declares that the Aryan hordes which swept down upon Megalithic Greece were round-heads under the command of a few long-headed blondes, and that the latter were entirely responsible for the subsequent attainments of the Aryans during the golden age of Greece, we can easily guess the shape of the author's head and the shade of his complexion.

It is unfortunate that so much of this childish "my-father-was-a-smarter-man-than-your-father" attitude toward the subject of race has been circulated as adult reasoning. However, the study of the long distant past teaches a strange sort of perspective which gives tolerance. One begins to realize that for millenniums, this was not the white man's world which we have today; and yet in their native setting, the great geniuses flourished and passed away with the memory of their civilizations, as for example, those of Mayapan and Tullah. And who is to say that the white man's civilization, which is the dominant one of the present, is the way of the future?

We have found that the two main racial types of modern man are the two "harmonics"—the round-headed, round-faced Asian and the long-headed, long-faced Proto-negroid (before the negro), which seems to have been centered in India and the Indian Ocean. Did these two branches of modern man become separated before the Himalaya Mountains became high enough to wall them away from one another? If this is true, then man as a species is very old, as old as the elephant, the horse or the ox. Yet man must have traveled widely, and in his inter-tribal wars, kept many women prisoners, to have kept through the ages such a consistent singleness of strain.

We have also found that the first modern man to enter and drive the ape-like Neanderthaloids from Europe, was not a "harmonic," but a "disharmonic," or in other words, the result of a very early cross. Nevertheless, Cro-Magnon man had lived for such a long time in comparative isolation that he had consolidated his racial type to the point that he was as distinct a race as either of the two "harmonics" or the present negro.

WHERE was this homeland of the tall, hunter-artist? From whence did he come when he entered Europe on the flanks of the herds of the ancient ox and the buffalo? Most authorities insist that he came from Asia. Perhaps that is because most of the European nations are claiming him for a distant ancestor. (All peoples like to have large-brained ancestors, and Cro-Magnon was unusually capacious.) Or perhaps the scientists would prefer to ignore the obvious similarities between the Cro-Magnon type and the American Indian, rather than admit the possibility that a bridge of dry land existed across the North Atlantic at such a late period in the history of mankind.

However, some scientists do not choose to ignore these likenesses. Clark Wissler, the anthropologist of New York's Museum of Natural History, with the typical scientific caution, remarks:

"Cro-Magnon Man has in his disharmonic face one of the most prominent New World characteristics."

It is Huxley, however, with the boldness which characterizes this scientific thinker, who not only suggests that Cro-Magnon was an invading wave from America, but also suggests the original elements composing the cross. He postulates an early American invasion of Proto-negroids (having entered the new world by the same means or

in the same manner that the early tropical animals entered, whatever that was), clashed and mingled with an early invading group of roundheads coming across the Aleutian Islands. Then having been trapped in the new land by the advancing ice, which also protected them from added invasions from Asia, the race interbred and consolidated the striking disharmonic type which we may call "The Old Red Race."

For a moment let us analyze the likenesses between Cro-Magnon man and the American Indian. Both races were long-headed. Both had a very unusual short face. This face is built on the diamond. The width is the very prominent and high cheek-bones. From this point the face slants up into a sharply narrowing and often slanting forehead and down into a short, firm chin. Both races had a prominent, hawked nose and both had a long upper lip against which the under lip was closed in a thin firm line.

Nor is this all. Both races had the racial peculiarity of relatively short women who often come but to the shoulders of their men. In both races the frame is compact and well-knit. And both races had thighs of such a build that they were able to squat for hours upon their haunches. There are no differences.

PERHAPS it would be just as well if we put in here a word concerning the paintings for which Cro-Magnon is justly famous. Many of these cave scenes are fairly well-drawn and some show a touch of genius. However, the cave-artists often covered the paintings with a colored background in order to draw a fresh scene. During the intervening ages between his time and ours, these backgrounds have faded out, revealing the picture or pictures underneath in a welter of confusion.

At first the reason for this hodge-podge at certain points was not clear, but as one notices that these painted animals usually have an arrow at the region of the heart, one begins to realize that the pictures are ritualistic attempts to control the destiny of food-animals. Doubtless the particular spots chosen represented places of supposed potency.

In one of the only human representations, a dancing figure is painted as dressed in skins or fur-suits such as often used in Amerind (American Indian) dances. This figure, furthermore, has a long animal tail swinging behind as the owner moves, while a feather dangles from the hair. Perhaps it was this picture of a ritualistic animal-dance which caused the eyes of a number of anthropologists to turn inquiringly upon the American Indian.

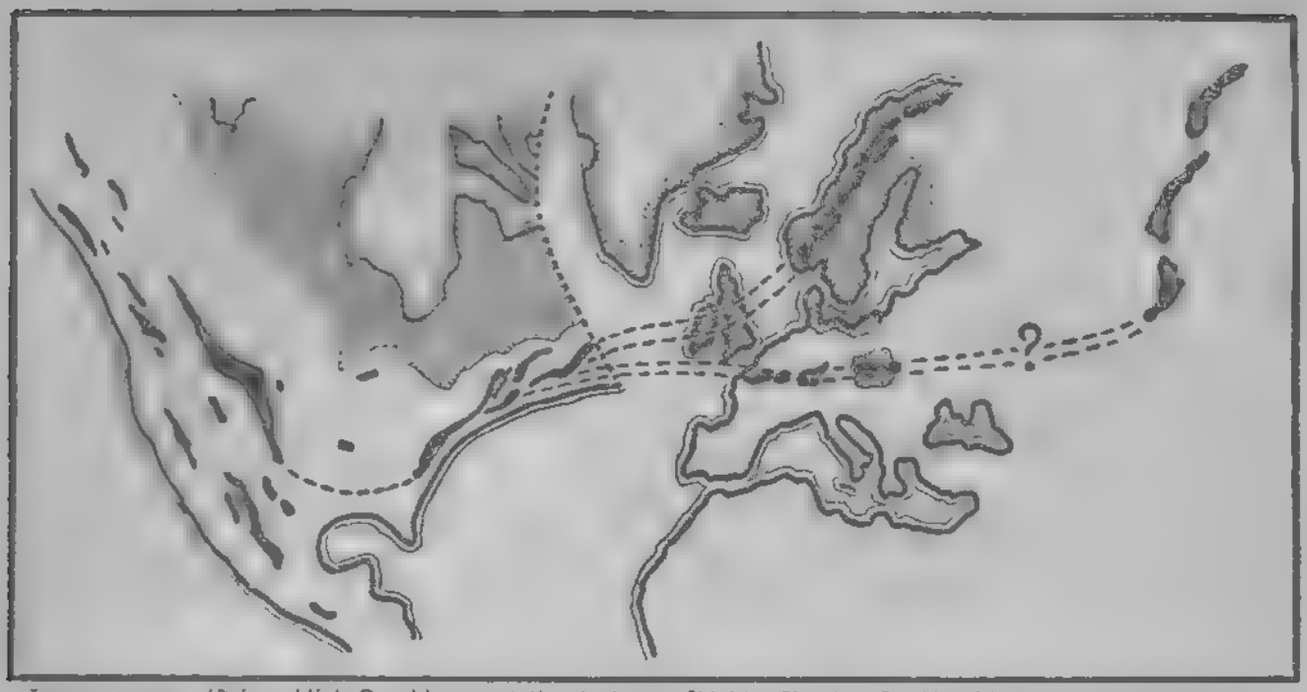
Most of the methods used to study the relationship between peoples cannot be applied to Cro-Magnon man. His clothes have fallen into dust too many millenniums ago. His gods are unknown. Of his legends, we have none, unless they have survived among the present peoples of Europe. Of his language, we cannot say, though it may be significant that the Basque tongue of Spain and France bears a closer relationship to the Amerind tongues across the sea than to the Aryan languages which surround it. Similarly, we have no knowledge of the games played by the ancient European, if indeed, he played games. However, we do note once more, that the Basque game of "Polette" resembles various forms of the game as played by the Old Red Race, more closely than some of the Amerind forms resemble each other. Furthermore, although we do not know anything about Cro-Magnon dances, yet there are interesting resemblances between the Amerind Sun-dance and the quaint May-pole dance of Europe.

Is there any custom of Cro-Magnon which has survived, upon which we can base a comparison? Yes. We have his unique method of burial. Cro-Magnon was a great painter. He not only painted his caves, and probably his own body, but he painted his dead so heavily with red ochre paint that the earth is fairly saturated. Yet upon occasions, Cro-Magnon had a curiously lengthy and elaborate process known to anthropologists as "secondary burial." In this case, the body was first exposed until the flesh had all fallen away from the bones. Then the bones were carefully gathered, coated again with red ochre and laid away with their possessions.

NOW it is a well-known scientific fact that the cult of "secondary burial" is centered in the Americas. From the northern portion of North America to the southern part of South America we meet the rite again and again. Sometimes only portions of the old ritual have survived. Such is the custom of the Sioux of Dacotah who expose the body on high platforms, but at the end of a year instead of gathering the bones, they merely hold a dance. Or the custom of the Pueblos who carry the dead to their graves upon platforms held high in the air. Or the Chippewas who paint the body with ochre. The cult is as universal as the ball-and-stick game, or the Sun-dance, and like it, some tribes have lost parts or dropped other parts.

Among the Rama of Central America, the dead are interred upon platforms where they are partly mummified. Here we have the mingling of "secondary burial" with the mummification of Peru. However, among the Aurakians of southern South America, and the Bribri of Central America, the "secondary burial" rite was complete in every detail.

From these two tribes and from gleanings as to the meanings of the entire procedure, I have added my findings to those of Joyce—"Central American Archaeology" and have succeeded in piecing together the follow belief: For the year following death the warrior is earth-bound. His body is exposed to the purification of the sun, and where only the birds, which are sacred to the sun can touch it. At the end of the year when he



The pre-Paleozoic (Before Life) Cordillera and the Archaean Shield. Showing Earth's oldest mountain ranges. (A series of ranges are called a cordillera if raised at the same period and are parts of the same movement.) These mountains probably formed the North Atlantic land-bridge. Compiled by author from J. D. Dana, R. A. Daly, Chamberlin and Salisbury.

is ready for the journey into the underworld, the bones are gathered (the spot where they have been placed is taboo until now), and during ceremonies lasting many days the spirit is prepared for the journey.

The only point upon which my findings have differed with the authorities, is upon the meaning of the ochre paint. They have suggested that it stood for blood, thus making the spirit strong for its journey. Yet when I asked if this was the reason of old "Standing Bear" of the Blackfeet and upon another occasion, of "Dark Thunder" of the Chippewas, they denied same. They both told me essentially the same story.

"Red is the sacred color of the sun. Every tribe will tell you the same. Red skin is the aristocrat of all skin tones because it is the skin-shade of all the Children-Of-The-Sun. Now if during the year of earth-wandering, the warrior has become pale, how can the sun-god be expected to know him for his own unless we rub the bones with red ochre?"

WHEN pressed to explain why some Cro-Magnon bodies were buried and others exposed before internment, "Dark Thunder" of the Chippewas had no idea, but "Marksman," a much older man, immediately volunteered:

"That happened during war or when the tribe was on the march. They had no time for the longer and better way. There is a legend which says that once our tribe did the same." (Used the longer ritual.)

Thus we have apparently located our third great pre-glacial well of modern man. Yet we must not suppose for a moment that the Americas are entirely inhabited by The Old Red Race. As we go west in North America we find that the tall disharmonic is replaced with greater frequency by a short round-headed harmonic with a short nose. Furthermore, we must explain that tribe of "Maski" Indians in the Brazilian jungles who fit the description of the Proto-negroid type.

However, toward the southern part of the continent we again meet The Old Red Race, and when we do, the sight of tobacco in stone pipes, infants in laced-up cradle boards and the custom of "secondary burial" bring it to our attention with a shock. Furthermore, it is to be noted that The Old Red Race is upon the whole, most frequently to be found in the high Andes, and in scattered "islands" among other types along the shore of the Atlantic, though it is the most heavily concentrated upon the eastern half of the States.

Remembering our unfailing rule that the older population of a land is to be found in the mountains or upon the outlying edges, we begin to see a clarifying picture. Taking a lesson from the position of the Scotch, Irish and Welsh, we can judge the direction of the Anglo-Saxon invasion into England. Similarly, we must postulate an invasion of round-heads into America from the west, the north-west, or both. And furthermore, since Scotch and Irish Gaelic are still mutually understandable, we must recognize that the initial invasions dividing the tribes of The Old Red Race took place at a far greater antiquity.

It will doubtless be argued that The Old Red Race never did attain the greatness of its early promise, for the invasion of the white man has found the redman still following the herds of the buffalo. However, it is much too early in our study of the Amerind to give a definite answer to this riddle. We sometimes catch glimpses of a vast astronomical knowledge in the complicated calculations for ritualistic dances. It may be that The Old Red Race represents the fragments of one of man's earliest civilizations, which is scattered along the coast of the Americas like the splinters of one vastly ancient titanic wreck.

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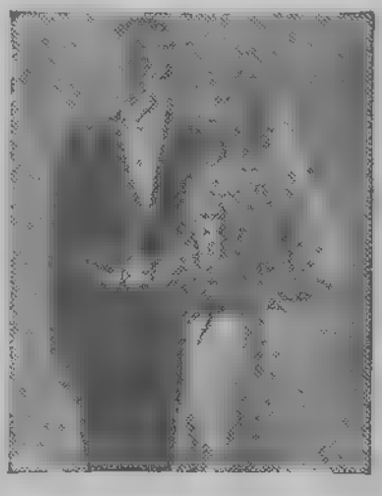

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DISCUSSIONS

A ... published in each issue a selection of letters from readers ... me to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

YERXA TOPS

Sirs:

Contrary to the popular belief that the most publicized story is the best in the issue, I thought that "Death Rides At Night" was the best yarn in the Mag. "The Vengeance of Martin Brand" would be second. I thought that "Moon Madness" was pretty lousy. Hank Kuttner's novel was good, too. Puleeezz!!! no more Cummings!!!! more Hadley !!! Boy !!! that Pic for L. Yerxa's was tops.

EUGENE SETCHELL,
119 E. State St.,
Algona, Iowa.

Undoubtedly Mr. Yerxa will be glad to see that you liked his story so much. He'll be back again in the future. He reappeared in the October issue, you know. Hadley will be back too.—ED.

YOUNGEST READER?

Sirs:

I thought the July AMAZING was perfect! All the stories were fine, except "The Powers of Darkness," which I did not like. Please don't print any more like that. Ray Cummings is *swell!* I liked the Observatory. Jay Jackson is my favorite illustrator. Does he do the back cover? I liked that, too. Hawk Carse was good.

I am only 11 years old, which I think makes me your youngest reader. I think both AMAZING and *Fantastic* are the greatest magazines I have ever read!

GEORGE EBEY,
4766 Reinhardt Drive,
Oakland, Calif.

We're tickled to have you for a reader, George! But we're afraid you'll have competition on that "Youngest reader" business. How about it? Any more of our readers as young or younger than this lad? No, James B. Settles does the back cover.—ED.

CHARACTERS WANTED

Sirs:

"The Vengeance of Martin Brand" started off nicely, and if the ending is as good as the beginning, it'll be a darn good serial. Cabot's short was good as usual. "The Sheriff" was O.K., but I seem to smell something stale. Yerxa wrote a fair story, and Fearn's was no better. Kuttner should be shot for his story. Percy Wren wrote it so much better. Festus didn't let me down, though. He always is one of the best. More, *PLEASE.* Powell was swell, too. Lewis only wrote a fair yarn. Bond is among the best.

Art—Mac can do better. MILBURN? Plenty good. Jackson was sloppy. Hadley, fair. Fuqua and Smith—O.K. Others O.K. Back cover—swell.

Get more—Adam Link, Lanse Biggs, Horsesense Hank, Don Hargreaves, Hok, Henry Horn, etc. Also, more *BURROUGHS.*

JOHN NORDSTROM,
116 Pratt St.,
Minneapolis, Minn.

All of the characters you mention are coming back!—ED.

"DESERVES A LETTER"

Sirs:

Guess what? At last I shall write you a letter and this August issue certainly deserves a letter. It is truly amazing that you can just hand Williams a cover illustration and tell him to make a story out of it, but still more amazing that he made such a grand story from it. Amazing stories are truly amazing—Bond's short was only fair. "Giants Beyond Pluto" was a splendid story but "Stinky" smelled a little. I still like him though.

I was expecting a better tale coming from McGivern but it is was still good.

I dislike serials as a rule but nevertheless the last two have been amazing. "Gods of the Jungle" will never be forgotten (by me anyway).

I think "The Vengeance of Martin Brand" should have ended differently, but then—I'm just a sucker for happy endings. See if you can get Irwin to write a sequel to "The Vengeance of Martin Brand."

In a final statement I am in full agreement with Julian Snider—get *Finlay* and *Paul* for interior illustrations!

IRA WATSON,
806 S. Barker,
El Reno, Okla.

We have several marvelous Finlay illustrations on hand, and they will appear soon. Watch for them both in Amazing and in Fantastic.—ED.

(Continued on page 236)

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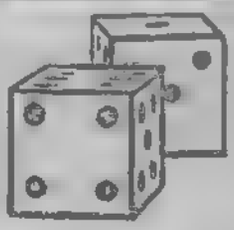

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(Continued from page 233)

LESSER IS BACK!

Sirs:

I'll bet you wonder why I didn't drop you a line in over half a year. Well, it's this way. You see, one day I says to myself, says I, "If they're (you) going to cut and change letters the way they do, no real, truthful comments could get out.

But now there are two reasons why I'm banging the old keys again. One: I like you too much to keep away; and to miss your ed notes is just plain torture. Two: AMAZING has improved so much (on the level) lately, that I can't help but write.

Now you are going to be handed a list of the ten best stories thus far this year.

1. "Planet of Doomed Men." This one, by Williams, hails from away back in frosty January. And it's the kind of story I go for. You know, a doomed race, and its last death throes.

2. "The Return of Hawk Carse." Gilmore came back with a bang; and a bang-up good story. More power!

3. "Disciples of Destiny." Naturally, Wilcox. I guess it was his unique way of writing, veiled under a fine plot that won this spot for your second best author. (My opinion.) Binder is your best.

4. "Adam Link Saves the World." Sure here he is, Binder! And am I glad he quit the comics and is back to stay. I can't wait for "After An Age." Puh-leeeeeze, as soon as possible. Poor Lesser willllll die if he doesn't see a full-lengther by his favorite.

5. "The Crystal Planetoids," by Coblentz, the old master, is another of the type I go for. The world wrecker theme. Ed Hamilton's old line, eh?

6. "Gods of the Jungle." Fine and dandy, plus. But Bond can do better. This was strictly adventure, though of a most enjoyable type. Sure, it was good.

7. "Treasure on Thunder Moon," by Hamilton. Exact comment as last. Ed can do better.

8. "Time Will Tell," by Emil Petaja (?). Well, well, a short taking eighth honors. What is the world, and more specifically, science-fiction, coming to?

9. "Mystery of the Blue God," by Bates takes this spot. It was a grand yarn, with one pitfall, didn't move fast enough.

10. "The Immortality of Alan Whidden," just a darn good time tale by that master all time tales, Ralph Milne Farley.

Some suggestions: Keep up full lengthers, no serials, by such men as Wilcox and Binder. Sure, even run them up to seventy-five thousand words.

Ned Hadley is the best artist on your current staff. One comment that I must get through about *Fantastic Adventures*. Don Wilcox's "Eagle

Man" was the best story *Fantastic* or AMAZING has ever printed and onhand I'd say it is among my three best stories of ALL TIMES!!! AND THAT *IS* GOOD.

MILT LESSER,
2302 Ave. O,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

A GIRL WE LIKE!

Sirs:

Here is another voice to swell the ever-increasing chorus of the *young* readers who so offend some of their elders. But I happen to be rather proud of the fact that I am only 15, and have been reading stf. in general for seven years and AMAZING STORIES in particular since it changed hands—about '38, wasn't it? Add to these items the further information that I am a female and am writing for the first time to *any* magazine, and you have—

Now down to business. Brickbats first, as I seem to have more of these than anything else, and I won't be happy until I've aired them from the closet where they've been accumulating for years.

Art:

1. Who the double-barreled h—eck said Finlay ranked *after* Magarian? Let me at 'im! I'll tear 'im limb from limb! Finlay is a much better artist than Magarian. His work is more polished, more finished—naturally enough. But he should stay in fantasy, where his delicate, ethereal style is appropriate and appreciated.

2. Magarian *is* the best artist you have as far as people goes. Keep him off machinery; give it to Paul, the only thing he's good at anyhow. Milburn ranks almost as high as Magarian, if not higher.

3. The rest of your artists, of whom Fuqua undoubtedly is best, are comparatively lousy.

4. Keep McCauley if you can, not only for covers but for interior illustrations as well. Malcolm Smith ranks next at covers; has he ever done any interior work? I did not mention these two before as I thought them in a class by themselves.

5. Sorry to save these matters for the last, but I think they rate a point by themselves, too.

a. Why don't you ever get Leydenfrost, the only artist who can illustrate slicks and pulps, fantasy and stf., with equal and ever-charming facility? (Whatever you do, don't drag Bok into stf. He is excellent but not in that field. Same goes for Dolgov.)

b. Am I the first to wake up, or does everyone know it but me? Are there *two* Magarians? And if not, why do you frequently say, the Magarians?

c. I thought Captain Stinky was, if not well into middle-age, at least singularly unattractive. Milburn depicts him in the September issue as rather handsome, and definitely young.

d. It may seem a bit silly, but I've always wanted to know: is Julian Krupa any relation

(Continued on page 239)

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Airship Of Io

By Henry Gade

Io, Moon of Jupiter, is one of the most wildly jumbled and mountainous worlds, thus its aircraft are supreme.

SINCE this world, a satellite of giant Jupiter, is almost entirely covered by a terrible jumble of mountain ranges, travel over its surface is a difficult thing, and its people, who live almost exclusively in underground cities built of pure crystal, have developed aerial travel to a high degree of perfection.

Their airships would be the envy of Earth engineers, both as to construction design and motive power. A hundred thousand years of civilization have developed the airship of Io to almost one hundred per cent efficiency and perfection.

Io might be termed the arctic world of the solar system. It is a desolate waste of mountains and snow and glaciers, with desert areas between the mountains where nothing grows but a hardy cactus. The cities of Io are constructed of crystal, which occurs in natural formation on this world which abounds in silicon. Roofed over, with crystal roofs which collect and direct the meagre sunlight downward, their only practical access to the outside world is by air, or by tunnel. A system of tunnels do exist, but are not extensively used. It is the airship that carries the burden of travel.

Airlocks in the domes of the cities admit the ships very conveniently, and great elevators take them down to city level.

On Earth, science is still experimenting with atomic power, using U-235 as fuel. On Io, this power has been used for centuries. Pitchblende deposits are available on Io in great quantity, having been exposed by the torture of its creation, which hurled its gigantic mountain ranges into being.

Therefore, U-235, available in quantities which make it the only practical fuel, has been developed until it has become the wonder-fuel of the solar system. The airship is the classic example of its highest development.

Strictly speaking, since Io has an atmosphere, the airship of Io is exactly that. It is an airplane, and has wings to support it. However, it more closely resembles a rocket ship designed to traverse space than it does a plane.

Its body is a slim, streamlined, torpedo-like structure, perhaps two hundred feet long. Its wings are very much like those of a bird, and rather short and stubby compared to the weight they are required to carry.

However, the super-power of atomic energy makes these smaller wings desirable, since power is cheap and available in great quantity and they make for greater maneuverability and greater stability and strength.

Rocket tubes, mounted in each wing, form the motive power, plus the directional power. Steering is by means of the motors almost entirely, simply by a delicate control of the jets. The plane itself operates mostly on the glider principle insofar as operation is concerned.

Actually, we might say that the airship of Io is a "steam" ship. It operates on water, which is broken down by the action of U-235 into its component atoms. Water is carried in four tanks, two located at the tail of the ship in streamlined containers, to add balance to the ship and in two more mounted in the forward part of the rocket tubes themselves. The water carried can drive the ship for many complete circuits of the planet, without being replenished. Mainly the quantity carried is to provide weight. Io has a light gravity pull, and added mass is desirable in the plane.

Braking rockets are not built into the plane because of the danger of opposing forces tearing the ship apart, or crushing it. Thus, water tanks are used in a unique method to halt the ship. The rocket tubes are so mounted that they can be swung around on the wings and reversed, jets pointing forward when a stop is desired. This brings the weight of the water in the rocket tubes to the rear, and to balance the ship the water in the rear tanks is diverted by means of pipes into the fuselage of the plane itself, more nearly at the center of gravity.

In case of an emergency landing, the rear water tanks keep the tail down, and allow the ship to glide in the snow without digging in. However, such landings are so infrequent that they are a matter of record by centuries rather than by year.

In maneuvering around mountains at low-level flying, diverting water from one tank to the other provide a constant and dependable method of controlling a turn, simply by the exact amount of mass that can be transferred to swing the ship around by the tail.

Constant temperature is maintained by diverted steam from the rockets.

(Continued from page 27)

to Gene Krupa, drummer extraordinary? The name seems familiar for some reason.

Dear ...

1. I ... to the readers' page and comments.

... which pop up unexpectedly. They help keep ...

... Ah, at last to the main dish!

1. As to authors and general story quality, keep on doing what you are doing. And how about another Hawk Carse story? G. H. Irwin, intentionally or not, leaves himself wide-open for a sequel. It's unconstitutional to just leave a story dangling like that, that's what it is!

MARIAN CRANE,
W 912 Fourth Ave.
Spokane, Wash.

Okay, Marian, we can take it. Your comments on the art work are definitely definite. Yes, Smith has done interiors. We have several on schedule for future issues. The Magarians are Albert and Florence, man and wife, and there's a little Magarian too! So many different artists do work for us, even on series, that we have many conceptions of each. We hope this variety doesn't confuse you. Krupa is related to the drummer, if memory serves us right. If we are wrong, we'll pass on the information when Krupa corrects us from wherever his Marine detachment is stationed.—ED.

VICTORY ISSUE A SUCCESS

Sirs:

Aside from the fact that Ned Hadley and L. Raymond Jones are the worst illustrators that ever appeared (or sneaked) between the covers of any science-fiction magazine I have yet seen, your Victory Issue was a great success.

I have rated your stories below:

1. The Vengeance of Martin Brand.
2. Blitz Against Japan.
3. Robotcycle for Two.
4. The Love Song of Lancelot Biggs.
5. Captain Stinky's Luck.
6. Giants Beyond Pluto.
7. Vengeance on Venus.
8. Convoy in Space.
9. Peace Mission to Planetoid X.

There are but four improvements that you can make on AMAZING STORIES as follows:

1. Trimmed Edges! If you can't give us them, please explain why.

2. Caption on the title page of each story telling who illustrates that story.

3. A cover or two (I hope more) by the Magarians.

4. The same number of covers by Virgil Finlay. Incidentally, a while ago you said his covers were not suited to AMAZING STORIES or *Fantastic Adventures*. If you'll take a look at the circulation figures of a certain mag he paints covers for

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Trimmed edges? First, more readers say no than yes. Second, they add to the expense of publishing, which would mean reducing somewhere else. Reducing the fine quality of the stories is certainly not wanted. Next, and last, trimmed edges wouldn't persuade one single reader more to pick up the book. The stories are what count. And we have the best book on the stands. Artists usually sign their illustrations. However, we'll think about credit lines in the future. Magarian does not paint covers. Finlay? We'll go to work on this matter right now. But as for circulation figures, who's kidding you? We rank among the nation's leaders!—ED.

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I like immensely the quaint amusing stories by Robert Bloch, the thrilling adventuresome stories by Jep Powell, but ah—umph—give us more Miles J. Breuer. I like Westerns, and this type sorta got me entranced. In case you didn't know what I hinted at—it's THE SHERIFF OF THORIUM GULCH in the August issue. Please don't save such darn good yarns as this and keep us ignorant of their existence. Pull them out and give 'em to us. Gosh—I was spellbound by the whole thing.

As per DEATH RIDES AT NIGHT, viz Leroy Yerxa, it read something like a super-collosal story. Yerxa is a good story writer and more of his material should be given encor(e)agement. What's all this DRIVEL about trimmed edges? I thought the matter was settled. I for one, prefer untrimmed edges—as they afford a better "grip" and easier to turn. As it is, AMAZING is trimmed to a rather close perfection, which is good enough in any man's language. Back cover illustrations seem to be improving. From the way it seems to me, many of the readers fail to realize the small number of mistakes AMAZING STORIES makes in its stories and articles, and thus they try to find mistakes and often as not prove themselves wrong and AMAZING right. This is an enviable record of achievement AMAZING should be proud of. Every magazine strives for perfection, but FEW ever obtain it. It is my firm belief of opinion, AMAZING has achieved, in large measure, perfection of material, accuracy, and entertainment. My hat goes off to a splendid publication, that is run by a darn nice bunch of gents.

JOHN M. CUNNINGHAM,
2050 Gilbert Street,
Beaumont, Texas.

Thanks for all them kind words, pal!—ED.

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AIRSHIP OF IO

The plane of Io is really a rocket ship with wings. It has no propeller being flown entirely on rocket motors and jets. It is streamlined, lightnin fast. Its fuel is U-235; atomic power. (See page 238 for complete details)